A Tale of Reading Town

J. Bennett Nolan

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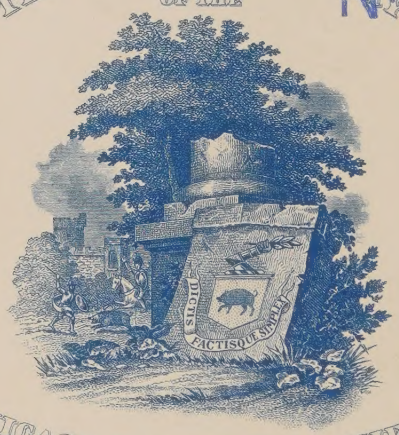

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A TALE OF READING TOWN

A Tale of Reading Town

An Episode from the
Plot against Washington

By J. BENNETT NOLAN

1930
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"But Sir if there is any truth in a report, which has been handed to me, viz, that Congress has appointed, or as others say, are about to appoint, Brigadier Conway the Major General in this army it will be as unfortunate a measure as ever was adopted."

—WASHINGTON TO RICHARD HENRY LEE
October 17, 1777

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Foreword

My own kindly Pennsylvania town is a bustling place whose prim façades and well ordered streets afford small suggestion of bygone sentimentality. It is rescued from prosaic resemblance to a hundred manufacturing cities of its size only by the vernacular of its inhabitants; for the tenacious race who settled here, two centuries ago, are slow to change either in speech, mannerism or trend of thought.

But be the present environment as sordid as it may, the place can vaunt a romantic past. Prisoners in three wars and of many nationalities trudged its streets, watched the sun set over the river and the western hills and wearied for the hour of their deliverance. Notable men splashed through our ford and alighted at our taverns, Franklin in 1756, well pleased to show his versatility in the rôle of a militia commander, guttural Baron Steuben, newly come to instruct the impossible colonial drill

sergeants, Mr. President Washington, in his stately progress towards the suppression of the truculent whiskey rebels of the Alleghanies, the fugitive Continental Congress, a harried cavalcade of tired men on jaded horses, escaped from Philadelphia and groping their way towards York.

And in the trying summer of 1777 a knot of darkling, disaffected military gentlemen made my town their trysting place for the hatching of a mad project to unseat the Commander-in-Chief and elevate General Horatio Gates, a dimly comprehended conspiracy which history terms the Conway Cabal.

Now, in searching some local records dealing with the Revolutionary era, I came frequently upon the engaging personality of one Richard Tea of Reading, a man of parts and enterprise, it would seem, for he represented his county upon the Committee of Public Safety. I noted too, that his name frequently appeared linked with many whom we vaguely associate with the Cabal. Then, in sorting some much earlier documents, I came pat upon an indenture for a lad sent out as a Redemptioner, in 1746, by the Proprietary himself, that august absentee, Mr. Thomas Penn. It was this same Richard Tea, a foundling out of the great charity school in London, Grey Friars, Colonel Newcome's school.

In this quaint instrument the apprentice binds himself, according to the form, "not to frequent ale houses or play houses" (a superfluous restriction one might suppose) "not to commit fornication nor to contract marriage but ever to advance his master's interest." In consideration whereof the Master agrees to furnish "one compleat suit of apparel and to induct the apprentice into the Art or Mystery of Surveying." This "Mystery" was to be taught young Mr. Tea in the office of William Parsons, predecessor of the great Nicholas Scull as Surveyor General of the Province of Pennsylvania. With the indenture is preserved a faded letter from Mr. Parsons, addressed to the Proprietor, then luxuriously taking the waters at Bath, informing him that young Tea has arrived in good spirits and is already "faithfully sedulous in the practique of trigonometry."

This then was the humble genesis of the Committeeman. As I studied these yellowed papers I began, mechanically as it were, to weave a romance about my surveyor's clerk and to fancy that he consorted with the conspirators not to aid them, but rather as a stout patriot to sound the depths of their design. For I was loth to think ill of my hero.

And so my fugitive fancy wandered to the figure of Thomas Conway the raparee adventurer, com-

panion of Lafayette after the mad expedition to Charleston,—the soul of the Cabal.

In the absence of specific characteristics I began to construct him as a sort of Barry Lyndon or as Francis Burke in "The Master of Ballentrae," a man of extraordinary moral simplicity—almost vacancy, plastic to any influence, the creature of his admirations. After all, I reflected, the Chief though First in War and Peace never exerted himself to win over his own military family by any suggestion of blandishment.

"Had the great man said but a word of kindness to the small one (as he would have slipped out of his chariot to shake hands with Lazarus in rags and sores if he thought Lazarus would have been of service to him) no doubt Esmond would have fought for him with pen and sword to the utmost of his ability; but my Lord the lion did not want master mouse at this moment so Muscipulus went off and nibbled in opposition."

These words written by the greatest of romancers for the best drawn figure in all historic portraiture might well apply to Conway. A fleeting appreciation from Washington would have saved him; but the gesture of conciliation never came and Conway was lost to vulgar intrigue.

In the crude handling of the narrative which follows something of the soul of young Richard

Tea is sought to be evoked in the character of Mark Bingaman. And the mercurial Celt who curvets and gasconades and plots may serve, failing a better conception, for a re-incarnation of Thomas Conway. Adequate justice I feel could only be done to such a character by the lovable Scot who lies buried on the hill top in the South Seas. Often, with Andrew Lang, have I deplored his passing. As I come upon some gripping incident or urgent character I think "He would have done much with this" or "This would have appealed to Him."

Inept as the delineation may seem, let no one for a moment conceive that the writer is under any illusion either as to the subtlety of the task or the imperfections in the manner of its accomplishment.

A TALE OF READING TOWN

CHAPTER
ONE

My Calling with a Word as to My Forebears

I, Mark Bingaman, erstwhile surveyor's clerk in the Province of Pennsylvania and now retired yeoman, dwelling at my own proper charges on the Manor of Logan, near the city of Penn, having in mind the uncertainties of life, do hereby set down certain happenings which befell in the gruesome winter of 1777 and 1778. For if, under Providence, I had some small part in the crowning mercy vouchsafed in the happy outcome of the late War for Independence, I trust that no one shall charge me with untoward vanity if, after all these momentous years, I record my adventures to the end that posterity may read and mayhap benefit thereby. In this present year of grace, since our salvation 1797, his excellency, Mr. Washington,

is in that second term as President, which, in his obdurate modesty, he terms his last. Already there is a disposition amongst our people to underrate the trials and sacrifices of the late struggle for Liberty. In my weekly *Journal* I read the scurrilous epithets applied to our Chief—"tyrant, usurper, patricide"—and can scarce believe that they concern our Washington so lately beloved. And in my mounting aggravation, I bethink me that a sober and fitting retrospect of occurrences which many now living can still recall were perhaps not amiss for the perusal of a thankless generation.

I am Pennsylvania born and while my father was ever chary of discussing his forebears yet my antecedents are no worse than those of some amongst us who now set up as the aristocracy of this infant Republic. The truth is that my sire had been a Redemptioner, bound over for a two years service, and had passed the Delaware capes in the train of Mr. Thomas Penn, the son of the great Founder, who came hither in 1732. Father loved to recall the long, stormy voyage and his landing in the loyal town of Chester. He was a pert, lively stripling who roamed all over the ship, deck and rigging, and came early under the eye of the Proprietor who, indeed, was an indifferent sailor and wearied of the tedious weeks at

sea. Mr. Penn noticed the lad and graciously promised him something of his countenance when once they should have landed in the Americas.

Mr. Gordon, the Governor, had journeyed down from Philadelphia to greet the distinguished guest and behind him a brave fellowship were gathered on the wharf at Chester on that sultry August morning. I have by me, as I write, a copy of the *Gazette* which sets forth how Mr. Logan was attired in purple, Mr. Biddle in grey and gold and Colonel Shippen in murrey with fall of Mechlin lace. Governor Gordon's coach, one of the six vehicles of state which the Province then boasted, was in formal array, with postillions and outriders, for the reception of the Proprietor.

In the background as though in protest against against all this frippery, stood a tall swarthy man dressed in a velvet suit of sober brown, who was duly presented as Nicholas Scull, Deputy Surveyor General for the Province.

"Well met, sir," exclaimed Mr. Penn, addressing Master Scull with something more than his usual warmth, for men said he was not always affable in his greeting to the Colonials. "My agents speak highly of your services and in our Manor of Ruscomb, in Berkshire, I have often examined your curiously drawn charts of these new lands. Here, now, is this lad Bingaman, a lively

young hopeful, who has been as a plague to me through the entire voyage. He has a two years term to work out as Redemptioner, but that is a fate which has befallen better men. Take him, I pray you, into your office and acquaint him with the niceties of your craft. His stipend is twenty pounds for the two years."

The Surveyor General bowed. "Willingly, your Excellency, and I shall expect you soon at my office on Arch Street, where there are some matters which crave your Worship's instant attention; also there are expeditions which we should make into the wild lands of Manatawny on the upper Schuylkill to the end that our northern frontier may be the better determined."

Mr. Penn assented and turned to mount into the Governor's carriage, while the crowd broke into renewed acclaim as he started northward towards Grey's Ferry.

Thomas Penn went back to England in 1741 never to return. And in the interval my father's affairs prospered. Mr. Scull was the most painstaking of masters and my father so apt a pupil that he presently served out his term of redemptioner, became a free man, and set up in a surveying office of his own, in the High Street. Moreover, he married a wife of the well-to-do Sachse family and erected the goodly brick mansion on

Second Street, near Sassafras Street, or as it is now called the Race Street, where our folk still dwell. I was born on the evening of July 11th, 1755, a portentous anniversary for the Province. My father, sallying forth at a late hour, to summon the doctor, was surprised to observe a general to-do and lamentation and upon inquiry from the watch, was apprised that the King's forces had come by a signal defeat in the western wilderness, that General Braddock, himself, had fallen and the French and redskins might be expected any hour upon the banks of the Schuylkill.

I was bred in Philadelphia and attended the old Academy. Afterward I took up my father's profession and was in the way of attaining some proficiency in the science when our political horizon became so perilously overcast. For my father was loyal both to Church and King and my mother, who had been brought up a Lutheran under the Rev. Dr. Muhlenberg and attended the German Church in Crab Tree Alley, must conform to the services of the English rite at Christ Church.

Now, as the debate between the Crown and these Provinces became more virulent, and as our brethren in New England waxed in truculent defiance, my father grew the bitterer in his obstinate devotion to the Royalist cause. Many of our friends were of the Whig persuasion and came no

longer to our board. We never saw Mr. Shippen or Dr. Rush or Captain Cadwallader. Dr. Franklin had sailed for London and my father, scenting sedition in his mission, could scarcely bid him a cordial farewell, although the two had been life-long friends.

So in the second year of the Revolution, the summer of 1776, a little ere the saddest winter ever Philadelphia saw, I was following my trade as surveyor and living at my father's house on Second Street, moody and ill content. For my own opinion in this vexatious dispute was formed some two years before and under these circumstances.

One afternoon in the sultry May of 1774 while the first Continental Congress was dragging its weary course, I had returned early to the house and was deep in the pages of Mr. Smollett's diverting tale of Peregrine Pickle when there came a shrill staccato from our front door clapper. I guessed that Dutch Peter, our Redemptioner house-servant was away upon a chore and it behooved me to answer the call. Upon the door-step stood a tall gentleman whom I knew at once both by the singular nobility of his features and by the fact that he alone, of all the delegates to the Convention, wore a military uniform. For this was the celebrated Colonel Washington of Vir-

ginia, who had so distinguished himself in the adventure of Fort Duquesne and whose soldierly qualities were held in high esteem at Whitehall. It had seemed of late that he was to belie the high promise of the French wars, for he had married a rich wife and appeared content to dream out the existence of a landed proprietor on his own estate; but his hour was presently to come.

Colonel Washington inquired if this were the mansion of Surveyor Bingaman and if he were at home. Confused at this unexpected encounter with the subject of my admirations I could only mumble that my father was momentarily expected and lead the way into the pine parlour. The Virginian glanced about the comfortable chamber, seated himself upon the love-seat which deft Master Savery had contrived for my mother, and with affable gesture made room for me beside him. He asked as to my calling and nodded his approbation, shewing for so grave a man an unwonted manner of cordiality.

"I too am a surveyor," he explained, "and sometimes I tire of this lazy planter's life and long for my log office at Winchester in the Virginia mountains. What with the trackless wastes, the wild beasts, and our good friends the French, life was active enough. I grow soft now and weary for the stirring days of old. But you, young sir, follow

your trade in a settled district. Running farm lines for these portly Quakers is not likely to afford excitement. Still, who knows? These are critical times and each may be called upon to play a man's part."

This mysterious portent following closely upon some hints I had heard that day at the Coffee House aroused my interest and I made bold to ask,

"Is there really risk, Sir, of a rupture with the Crown?"

Mr. Washington sighed.

"Anything is possible while evil counsellors have his Majesty's ear. I am no fire-eater like some of our brethren from New England. We who fought for King George the Second are loth to fight against his grandson, but at Whitehall they drive fast for a break and now Gage is to be reinforced with ten thousand men in Boston, as though we were already avowed rebels. What say you, lad, if the call comes? Will you rise for a United America?"

This sudden appeal called for a solution which I had not yet arrived at in my own mind and I answered confusedly,

"I trust, Sir, I shall always demean myself as a loyal son of the Province."

"'Of the Province'!" said Washington, half to

himself. "That is aye our weakness. How shall we weld these detached commonwealths into one united whole? But here comes my colleague, Mr. Carroll, and your father upon his heels."

Mr. Carroll entered, a spare, middle-aged aristocrat, faultlessly dressed in the latest London mode, who took his rapee from an exquisite ivory box and leaned on a goldheaded cane. My father bustled in, patently puzzled at the visit, bade the gentlemen welcome and dispatched me for comfits and Madeira. I went upon my errand, still intent upon the remarks of my stately idol.

My own viewpoint seemed pitifully selfish compared with that of this approved soldier whom all men admired and yet who seemed to be willing to risk his patrimony for the sake of a Cause which I scarcely comprehended. It was known that as early at 1773 he had offered to raise a thousand men to march to the relief of the harassed folk of Boston, whose port had so arbitrarily been closed. What made my land after all, I wondered. I professed a certain loyalty to my Province and to its Governor and had even vague ideas of allegiance to the luxurious Proprietor taking the waters far over-seas at Bath. But what recked I for the New England Yankees, ever seeking to trick us in the West Indies trade, or for the cruel Patroons of New York? As for the Carolinas, men went

there in ships a longish journey to a land of tar and turpentine, blackamoors and rice swamps. Yet here was Mr. Washington to tell me of America, and I began vaguely to feel that I was more than a mere colonist of Pennsylvania, that I had a Country and must in the need quicken to its call.

Busied in these reflections I was inexcusably slow in my commission and re-entered the parlour in some expectancy of a rebuke for my tardiness. When I came I found all three gentlemen patently perturbed. There was an embarrassed rally and Mr. Washington, to relieve the tension, as I believed, asked if I knew how he had first come to make my father's acquaintance. I knew the tale but was fain to make pretense of listening again.

In the year 1751, George the Second reigning at St. James and Anthony Hamilton being Governor of Pennsylvania, my father, newly set up in his surveyor's business, was wearying for occupation. At this time he received a proposal from the Calverts of Maryland, successors to my Lord Baltimore. It liked him ill to serve under the Papists, but his affairs sped none too well and accordingly he journeyed into the Colony of Maryland and came finally to the town of Alexandria in Virginia, near which were certain plantations to be located. While lodging there, at the Bull Tavern,

he was visited by a tall young planter of the vicinity, who was himself a surveyor and who sought employment. My father was well impressed with the qualifications of this young Mr. Washington, but while he considered the matter, came Lawrence Washington, the elder brother, to propose a trip to the Barbadoes. George Washington sailed for the islands and naught came of the proposed engagement.

"I had better have served under your father," said the Colonel ruefully, as he concluded his reminiscence. "It was the only time that I left my native land and I got this."

He indicated the marks with which the smallpox, contracted in the West Indies, had marred the stateliness of his features.

This by-talk brought the gentlemen more easily to their departure and after they were gone, my father, walking to and fro in an agitated manner, protested that the times were out of joint and the world gone mad when two men of birth and station, owners, withal, of land and slaves, could seek to array themselves against his gracious Majesty. Mr. Carroll, to be sure, was a Romanist and had doubtless learned from the Jesuits how to play fast and loose. But for Mr. Washington, who had worn the King's coat, to so demean himself—'twas unbelievable.

"How came they here?" I inquired in some perplexity.

My father replied with an unwonted heat. "Upon an errand which, if I chose to play the marplot, might cost them their heads. They were here to persuade me to betray my lawful monarch and array myself with those mad gentlemen who daily gather in the Carpenters Hall."

I did not dare to tell him that I was newly come from attendance upon this same Convention in the Carpenters Hall and had been mightily moved by the discourse of the eloquent Mr. Peyton Randolph of Virginia who had argued for armed resistance to the encroachments of the Crown. I ventured however, to voice a feeble protest.

"Are we to have our ports closed, sir, at the caprice of our unfriends in the Privy Council?"

My father stared at me as though dumfounded by such evidence of disaffection.

"And to whom do you refer as 'we'? Know, sir, that the only nationality which a loyal colonist may claim is that of the great kingdom which saved us from the French and the savages. Had our defense been left to Colonel Washington and his ragged militiamen I opine that the Marquis de Montcalm would long since have been on the Delaware. If we were to buy stamps for a century we would still be in England's debt."

I was silenced before this outburst but like a flash there was borne upon me the conviction that here was a difference of viewpoint which only an appeal to the sword might resolve. Colonel Washington regarded this sea rim of struggling pioneers as a nation. My father and his compeers looked obstinately to St. James Street. I reflected sadly that I must soon make my choice for there could be no middle way.

My mother, gentlest and kindest of women, probably sensed the political cleavage which was to disarray our small household, but she was a bigoted Royalist herself, only the King whom she so blindly served was my father, who, in her eyes, could do no wrong.

CHAPTER
TWO

I Ride to the Wars

It were scarcely relevant to my tale to recite the months of struggle between my own growing conviction and my father's obstinate predilection. As I recall those vexing days of indecision my prevailing feeling seems to have been one of despair over the inevitability of the rupture which all abhorred and which each felt himself powerless to forfend. Our house was become a center for the Tory interest and there were anxious conclaves in the pine parlour. Judge Shippen came, and Mr. Galloway, and Dr. Duché, the rector of Christ Church, and Governor William Franklin of New Jersey, resplendent in scarlet and gold lace. My father took comfort in the thought that one member, at least, of the Franklin family was faithful to his allegiance.

I can well remember the afternoon of perturbation when we first realized that the end was come. I had been upon the river fishing since early morning, and met my father before our door. His shock was so manifest that I inquired involuntarily if there were news.

"Aye," said he, "news, indeed. The worst has happened and we have broken with the Crown. I stood today in the State House Yard and heard them read their accursed Declaration. *'Free and Independent'* was the phrase, Mr. Jefferson's they say, and how long I wonder will this deluded Congress remain *'Free and Independent.'* If they looked for encouragement from the citizens, their discomfiture must have been great. I tell you lad that most stood in silence, few applauded, and some even hissed."

And now there was little else in the City of Penn save drill and war-like preparation. Most of the boys of my class in the Academy were gone north to join the Continental Army and some of them had already snuffed powder with Montgomery at Quebec. At length, I could bear my shame no longer and one frosty morning, in December 1776, I left my father's house and rode steadily northward to where General Washington lay encamped by the Delaware.

My part in the war was neither long nor glo-

rious. For all my strength, I lacked address, and although afterwards the great Baron Steuben, himself esteemed the foremost drill master of his day, spent many weary hours with me, I was far from acquiring the true poise of a soldier. General Sullivan, who chanced by one day, was pleased to prophesy that I would one day dress the line like the rest, but it may be that I would have been assigned to a scrivener's position in the quartermaster's corps if in a fateful hour for me, we had not received the astounding command to recross the Delaware. Our vigilant leader had determined to turn upon the enemy and attack the Hessian hirelings, then deep in their Christmas revelry at Trenton.

Amid the general buzz of preparation word was passed that those apt with water-craft should report at headquarters. I had fished and hunted both of our rivers from Windmill Island to the Falls of Schuylkill, and, being fairly proficient, was assigned to the first boat. As it transpired my oarsmanship was not put to the test for on account of my unusual strength I was put in the bow of the boat with a long pole to fend off the floating ice. An officer high in rank sat behind me and I must admire the calmness with which he directed our perilous passage. Later I knew that this was the ill-fated General Mercer, who met his death,

shortly afterwards, at Stony Brook by Princeton. Once arrived on the Jersey shore, weapons were dealt out and, although my place was with the boat, I seized a musket and went with Sullivan's detachment down the river road. What with the cold and the darkness and the mud, our stumbling march was more like a dream, and when my file man pointed out a row of straggling lights, I could not believe that we had come so far as Trenton. A sound of tipsy revelry came from the village, with guttural voices united in a catch. I believe I shall recall the refrain in my dying hour.

Es steht ein Baum in Oden Wald
Der hat viel grüne Aest'
Da bin ich wohl viel tausendmal
Bei meinem Schatz gewest.

The next moment we were amongst them, I stumbling and lunging like the rest. A tall Rhinelander rushed out shouting, "*Hanau voran,*" and came at me with a bayonet. I shot at him and went wide of the mark, whereat he somehow gave me a gashing wound in the calf of the leg. Our wave of assault passed on and I must have swooned from the loss of blood for I knew no more.

When I woke up, I found myself in a great Conestoga wagon with sundry of our wounded, of

which in sooth there were not many, as our losses had been small. A man in uniform, whom I took to be a surgeon, looked at our wounds, and when he consulted with his assistant, I began to think we were all in the hands of the enemy, for they spoke in the German tongue. The doctor, marking my perplexity, addressed me in English, though with a marked Teutonic accent.

"Never fear, lad, thou art amongst thy own kind, but in Reading Town where I dwell all talk German save rogues and Tories."

I was apprised that this was the celebrated Dr. Bodo Otto, who served our cause so faithfully. He was German born and came from that part of the Province called Berkshire, settled by men of the Palatinate, with whose customs I was soon to become the better acquainted.

We paused, below Frankfort to bait our horses, and, by the fine weather, those of us in better case were led out into the sunshine. Upon the pallet next to me reposed a Hessian officer whose right arm was bound into a sling. Dr. Otto had addressed him in German whereat the prisoner replied in an excellent formal English of the schools, only strangely intoned as though the speaker had recently had but little practise in the tongue. The Doctor whispered to me that this was Hauptmann Wiederhold of Baum's Command who had just

been honored by an invitation to lunch with Washington himself.

I was curious to know what manner of man this was to whom Washington could accord such a courtesy in all the press of affairs and so engaged him in conversation. He told me that he had been three weeks in America and had come only two days before to Trenton.

"I made reconnaissance of the Pennsylvania bank," said he, "and reported your troop movements to Rall, but the drunken pig could think of naught but his Christmas debauch. Well, he has paid the penalty, but here are nine hundred of us, prisoners, who might have been saved by a proper patrol of the river."

I gathered from his speech that Washington had interrogated him as to the make-up of the Royal forces in Jersey.

"A fine gentleman this same Washington," said the Captain. "When I was a lad at Potsdam my father took me to see the great Frederick ride by, with his guards, and there is something very similar in the bearing of the two. Your troops," he glanced rather contemptuously at the unkempt militiamen who guarded us, "are not impressive but you have a notable leader."

Upon the resumption of our journey, Wiederhold was put into my wagon and diverted me

greatly by his recitals of his campaigns on the Rhine. But, I was mightily glad to see the lights of the Northern Liberties and know that we were home.

Just three weeks from the time I had stolen forth from my father's house, I was carried back up the steep marble steps. My mother wept for joy over my return, but my father stood grimly by without a word of welcome. And yet I might perceive a certain satisfaction that my transgressions had found such early and severe rebuke.

CHAPTER
THREE

I Hear of the Cabal

MY WOUND PROVED MORE OBDURATE THAN I had expected; perhaps it had been indifferently cared for in the racking journey to Philadelphia. I soon saw that many months must go by before I should be fit for active service and chafed at the realization; for I was become the laughing stock of our street. No one had the temerity to inquire directly how I had come by my injury, but I noted the covert sneers of our Tory neighbors and guessed that they were fully aware of my escapade.

While the American forces still held the city my plight was not so intolerable, but we began speedily to perceive that the evacuation was only a matter of time. My Lord Howe had landed his army on the Chesapeake and was driving steadily

northward, having already passed the Head of Elk. His light-armed foragers had been seen near Derby.

One rainy morning in September I stood in Second Street and saw the entrance of Lord Cornwallis with the Highlanders and the Artillery. They made a brave show in their scarlet finery but it was noted afterwards that the tune to which they marched was "The World Turned Upside Down," which was the same air to which the Marquis's troops afterwards marched out to surrender before Yorktown. Mr. Galloway, young Mr. Shippen, and others of the Tory interest rode brazenly behind the array. These we hissed when the military were not by.

When I was finally enabled to leave the house I consorted as much as possible with such young men of the Whig persuasion as for one reason or another remained in the city. There was a tavern called the Plough and Harrow in the High Street to which we would nightly resort to draw such consolation as might be from the military reports which grew daily more discouraging, and here we planned our mad prank for the baiting of Milord Colonel Tarleton.

Sir Banastre Tarleton is now accounted the best field officer who fought for the Crown in the Americas, as those who met him in the Carolinas

will testify; and it is maintained that, had he been given the supreme command instead of the sluggish Howe, the affair of the Rebellion might have had a different termination. But he was, above all, a martinet and, in the early days of the Philadelphia occupation, was not so much esteemed for his talents as hated for his severity.

Now it was whispered that before he donned the King's coat he had been a notorious London rake, and had kept as his mistress a comely woman of the stage, Mrs. Robinson, or "Perdita" as we impudently termed her in recognition of her favorite rôle. Being aware of all this, and hating the General for the rigor of his rule, what must we hot bloods do but contrive an outrageous effigy, labeled "Perdita," in scurrilous doggerel, and swing the same, after nightfall, over the Colonel's window to greet his waking gaze. The affront was the greater in that the lady was reputed most winsome and has since been painted by Mr. Romney and by Mr. Gainsborough.

That forenoon there was wild alarum. Milord Tarleton frothed in impotent rage and, at our noonday meal, my father regarded me with suspicious eye. If he had chanced to note that my bed had not been slept in the night before he did not advert thereon, but my guilty conscience drove me early from the house.

It was a drizzly morning, and, as I was picking my way along the slippery pavements of the High Street, I was amazed to see, on the opposite sidewalk, an officer in the full Continental uniform. The face was strangely familiar, and, as I crossed the street, I saw that it was my old attendant, Dr. Bodo Otto of the Pennsylvania Line. He knew me at once.

"Master Bingaman, as I live by bread, and how fares the leg? I'll warrant these red-coated gentry do not guess how your wound was come by or you would be trussed up in a military prison."

I told him that the wound did well enough up, but I was surprised to see him at large and in uniform in a hostile camp. With that he pulled out a sealed paper and continued with his curious German accent.

"Never fear, lad, here is a safe conduct from General Howe himself. I have just brought a convoy of wounded British from York to exchange them for a like number of our brave fellows."

He began to discuss the military situation, shaking his head as he recounted the plight of our harried army, now going into their cantonments up the river. Suddenly he clapped his hand to his forehead and ejaculated,

"*Gott in Himmel*, Bingaman, I believe you are

the very man for our purpose! Are you still of the honest party?"

I told him that I was as stout a Whig as ever, but now unfit for active duty. By this he continued to regard me intently as if turning over some momentous decision.

At length he said, "If it be your wish to further abet our cause, come to my lodgings at the King of Poland Tavern on Vine Street, but come privily and come tonight, for tomorrow I must go. I lodge in the north garret room."

That night I made my way out Sixth Street and turned down Vine to the Doctor's tavern. It was an indifferent hostelry, but all the best taverns were occupied by the British officers. As I entered the tap room, I heard voices singing in a strange tongue and saw that the room was filled with Highland soldiers, who were intoning a Gaelic lament. A tipsy private of the Gordons accosted me in broken English and offered a brimming beaker.

"To the King over the water, man," he stammered. "The white rose forever. King George has taken Philadelphia but here is to bonnie King Charlie at Avignon who has no city of his own."

Considering that these treasonable sentiments might have cost the man twenty lashes, I marveled

at his temerity but touched the beverage with my lips and passed on.

I knew the house of old and so passed directly through the room, found the stair, and mounted to the Doctor's room, a meagre piece directly under the roof. A bottle of Hollands and two glasses stood on the dresser, while the Doctor sat smoking his long clay pipe on the bed. I must, perforce, join him there as there was no other place to sit. So seated, moreover, we were at the less risk of being overheard.

"Are we really come to so sorry a pass?" said I, by way of beginning the conversation.

"Sorry enough," said he—I venture not, after all these years, to give his speech verbatim, for he used as many German words as English and often I must guess at the sense of that which he strove to articulate—"sorry enough, in the field, but worse, I fear, in the Council Chamber. I have not been to our camp by the Schuylkill, but I understand that we lack for everything and that the militia desert by hundreds. Unless his Christian Majesty of France declare for us, in the next few weeks, we may be put to it to preserve the semblance of a military organization. I am newly come from York, where their worships of the Congress are now convened, and it appeared to me that they did little else save bicker and calumniate.

There is no more head to their organization than to a barrel of Orkney herring. We have had rare good fortune in the north, but even our successes there have not mended matters, for there are plenty now to protest that General Gates is the proper man for Commander-in-Chief. And our great Washington, who, as all true men know, is the very soul of the cause, is daily villified by envious traitors. Listen, lad!"

He rose and opened the door to make sure that no one was eavesdropping and then joined me once more upon the bed, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"There is a vile cabal newly formed to the avowed end of unseating Washington. That English born traitor, Charles Lee, although a prisoner with the enemy, has a finger therein, as have Mifflin and Brodhead. Gates is vain and credulous and even Arnold wavers in the balance. Their creature is an Irisher, an adventurer named Conway, who recently joined us as a volunteer. I have secret advices from my home town of Reading that the conspirators gather there and that the plot comes shortly to a head.

"General Thomas Mifflin our late quartermaster, has a plantation at a place called Angelica near Reading and sulks there in his tent, biting his fingers at some fancied affront when his country hath most need of his talents. His wrath is fan-

ned by a malignant fellow, Captain Lutterloh, an appointee of Gates, whom some even suspect of connivance with the enemy. With them is Colonel Dan Brodhead ever unfriendly to Washington. Others of the conspirators are expected to repair shortly to Angelica. For the protection of our chief, we must have certain intelligence of their plans and this can best be procured by a total stranger. Anyone who came from behind our own lines would be an object of instant suspicion, but you, who are supposed to be a Tory and who would come, moreover, from this beleagured city, would be the very man for the purpose."

I arose from the bed and I suppose that my face reflected my keen disappointment, for I had expected an assignment of another sort.

"I am no spy, Captain Otto," said I, shortly.

The German Doctor extended his long arm and pulled me back on the bed with scant ceremony.

"I tell you, *mein lieber kerl*," said he and such was his intensity that had anyone been listening without, they must infallibly have heard him. "I tell you that if Washington goes, the cause falls with him, and I believe that, under God, you are the only man who can save him."

I was impressed, in spite of myself, by the man's emotion.

"But how am I to escape through the lines, even if I had the will to serve you?"

"That I do not know as yet. When you have said that you will embark with us it will be time enough to discuss the whereby. And now you had better go lest a longer visit attract suspicion to us both. Let me know your resolve by noon tomorrow, and may you rest well tonight, which is more than I am like to do."

The Doctor relit his long pipe and I stumbled down the steps and out into the dark street in a great state of agitation.

CHAPTER
FOUR

The Decision

In the critical times whereof I write, folk retired early and all shutters were barred. So, in turning into Second Street, I was the more surprised to observe two red-coated soldiers, one of whom held up a link or torch of pine knot, while the other endeavored to decipher the inscriptions on the door plates. The torch bearer accosted me to ask if a Master Mark Bingaman had lodgings thereabouts. I told him that I was the very man, whereupon he pulled out a letter and said that his instructions were to wait in case there were any reply. I broke the seal and read:

"General Headquarters
His Majesty's Army of Occupation
Philadelphia
Province of Pennsylvania.

To the Worshipful Master Mark Bingaman
(Ride and run till these be delivered.)

Sir:

You are hereby required to report at the headquarters of his Excellency, General Cornwallis, tomorrow, Wednesday, at ten of the forenoon. Whereof fail not.

Rawdon
Adjutant."

This unexpected summons, coming directly after the Doctor's revelation, cost me a fitful night, as you may suppose. I could only assume that some detail of the adventure of "Perdita" had been brought to the attention of the garrison commander, although why, in these stirring times, he should concern himself at so late a date, was past my comprehension. In the morning I spoke to my father, who was standing at the buffet pouring his morning dram of Nantz, but he made no effort to take or read the missive, which somehow caused me to suspect that the matter was not entirely new to him. My mother, too, who met me

in the hall, seemed fraught with mysterious import.

"Oh, Mark," said she, relapsing in her agitation into the clipped speech of her childhood, "if the opportunity is afforded thee, thou wilt surely throw thyself upon his Majesty's gracious clemency and give us no more concern."

I replied that I knew of no reason for seeking clemency of anyone and we presently repaired to the dining room.

No one of us had any bent of loquacity and our meal was pursuing its usual silent course when I suddenly asked my father if he had ever been to the town of Reading on Schuylkill.

"Reading?" said he in surprised manner. "Why I had a hand in its laying out. It was the year 1738, as I remember, when Governor Hamilton sent Mr. Scull and myself to survey the new location. Mr. Thomas Penn was with us, a fine fashionable, who shewed little interest in the proposed town, and was the more concerned that the Palatine farmers on the Tulpehocken should be so far in arrears in their ground rents."

" 'Lawd Bingaman,' he said once to me, 'would that I were back in the window of White's Club, or on the shady side of the Mall.' And then he bemoaned the fate which had brought him into the beastly wilderness of the upper Schuylkill where

there were neither good wines nor likely wenches. Richard Penn, who never took the trouble to come to America, wrote from Ruscomb Manor that the place was to be named from his father's favorite town in Berkshire, and you will find there a Callowhill Street, christened for the old Proprietor's wife, and one for Thomas and one for Richard, the present Proprietors, and one for Governor Hamilton, though none of these would ever trust his precious person so far into the wilderness. We had tryst, I remember, with Conrad Weiser, the Indian interpreter of whom you will have heard, he who served us so well in the French wars. He spoke some English and all of the Indian tongues and often dressed like a savage. The time whereof I speak, he was newly come from the cloister at Ephrata, where he had been a monk; but Governor Hamilton had driven up to the door with his coach of state and that was the end of Weiser's monkery, though he still wore the habit of the Brotherhood, that morning, as he rode through the Ford of Schuylkill to meet us. He shewed us a fair location betwixt the river and the hill called Penn's Mount and had a set of German names all ready for the streets, being the less pleased that their Excellencies had been before him in the nomenclature. I can well recall their discourse.

"Mr. Weiser whips out a scroll upon which he had writ down his suggestions.

" 'This great square,' said he in his broken English, 'We might call the Heidelberg Platz.'

" 'It is to be named after the Proprietor, my revered father,' said Mr. Penn. ' "Penn Square" sounds not amiss.'

"Mr. Weiser took a pinch of snuff and resumed the argument.

" 'This broad street bisecting the square, north and south could be called the Rhine Strasse.'

"Mr. Penn flecked a bit of loam from his velvet baldrick.

" 'It is to be christened Callowhill Street,' said he, 'after the family of my sainted Mother.'

"Whereat Mr. Weiser threw down his scroll in a mighty huff and had no more names to propose but he rallied later and helped us with our survey.

"You will find near Reading an eminence called 'Scull's Hill,' and in the town a street named for our family—'Bingaman Street,'—it rolls bravely to the tongue—but why do you ask all this?"

I told him that I had recently had speech with one from Reading and was anxious to know what manner of place it was.

"A likely place, with good shad fishing in the river, but full enough now, I can guess, with refugees from this unhappy town," said my father,

as he turned from the table. I rose likewise, took up my hat and sallied forth for my appointment albeit with reluctance.

Lord Cornwallis (or the Earl of Cornwallis, I had rather said, for I read in the *Gazette* that he is Governor, now, of the Crown lands in Bengal and probably thinks as seldom as may be of his misadventures in the Americas) lodged at the house of Peter Reeves on Second Street near Spruce. Two sentries stood before the door and when I gave my name I was ushered into the waiting room where sat six youths all, like myself, inclined to the Whig persuasion. Two of them had been engaged in the escapade of the suspended effigy, and we exchanged doubtful glances. One by one we were summoned to the interior apartment; my turn came last.

General Cornwallis sat writing at a corner desk as I entered the room, a short, thick-set, gray-haired man with a singularly engaging face and manner. He was well liked in Pennsylvania where, men said, that if he had always had the ear of Lord North and Lord Germaine, we might still be contented subjects of the Crown. He bowed politely when I gave my name, and consulted a scroll which lay before him. Once he looked up at my bandaged leg and I could have

sworn that he stifled a smile. At length, he pushed the memorandum aside and turned in his chair.

"Master Mark Bingaman, I have good reports of you as the scion of a loyal family and one who should be in the service of his rightful monarch in these distracted times. I do not ask as to your past sentiments, but simply point out to you that his Majesty is here, overflowing with royal clemency and only anxious that past mistakes be forgotten, provided loyalty be shown in the future. An active man like yourself, skilled, moreover, in the niceties of your craft, could play a stirring part."

I was completely taken aback by this suggestion and could only murmur that my physical handicaps precluded me, temporarily from active duty of any sort.

"We have considered that, Master Bingaman," said the General, "and I have here the very assignment whereby you can at once set at rest these rumors which reflect upon your loyalty and at the same time be of service to his Majesty. You should know that our troops occupy the German Town. We propose to advance further, in a few days, and to engage the enemy now entrenched near the White Marsh, where that frog-eating adventurer the Marquis de Lafayette holds command. However, we need guides, and many of

them, men intimately cognizant of the countryside. You, with your surveyor's experience, are the very man to serve us. Now, tomorrow, at daybreak, I am sending a wagonload of blankets to Colonel Musgrave's brigade, somewhere above Mt. Airy. Will you guide it thither and attach yourself to Colonel Musgrave's staff as volunteer?"

In a flash I perceived the promise which the offer entailed. Here was the very instrument for our purpose, and come opportunely to my hand.

"I will go, General," said I, simply.

Cornwallis regarded me sharply.

"Why, well and good then," said he, as though surprised at my ready acquiescence. "Report to the Commissary Department tomorrow at daybreak. Written instructions will await you there. Your assignment might endure for a fortnight."

I was turning to go when he again accosted me.

"And look you, Master Mark, in future leave the hanging of effigies to others or it may be that you will yourself swing instead of the image."

I bowed to hide my mortification and left the room. My Lord's parting gibe had been the one thing necessary to confirm my resolution. It shewed me plainly that if I stayed in Philadelphia I would be treated with the contemptuous tolerance vouchsafed to a child who had played with flame and been scorched thereby. If I were ever

to play a man's part, it must be now. I hastened down the Sixth Street, scarcely reckoning as to whether I were followed, and climbed to the Doctor's garret. He was sitting on the bed just as I had left him, puffing heavily on his long pipe.

"I am with you, Captain Otto," said I, "heart and hand."

. . "*Gott sei dank!*" ejaculated he. "For if you had failed me, I should not have known where to seek for an agent proper to our plan."

CHAPTER
FIVE

Wherein I Go Forth from the City of Penn

At daybreak I passed out of the city, showed my credentials to the sleepy sentinel and took the muddy Cohocksink road to the northward.

My father, delighted at my apparent change of heart, had given his pleased consent, in which my mother, persuaded of the heroism of my venture had readily joined. Indeed I felt convinced that my mission had been offered through parental solicitation and that I was being given opportunity to display some definite proof of my loyalty.

I was attired in sober, durable traveling costume with a change of linen in a shoulder sack. For arms I had a stout hickory baton; and between my stocking and the sole of my left foot reposed a letter written in cipher by Dr. Otto and addressed

to His Excellency, Peter Muhlenberg, Major General of the forces of the Continental Congress.

My Conestoga wagon was not so large but that two stout horses might pull it, fully laden. These I recognized as part of the erstwhile stock of Mr. Galloway's plantation at Merion and was secretly pleased that the owner's dastardly Toryism had not sufficed to save his property from confiscation. I sat on the seat next to the Highland soldier who drove and was none too pleased at the maladress with which our vehicle was conducted. This driver was a spare, elderly man attired in a nondescript uniform, shod in Highland brogues, and topped with a bonnet of the famous regiment formerly known as the Black Watch.

We jogged on over the puddles while he regaled me with anecdotes of the siege of Quebec in General Wolfe's time.

"Ye ken," said he with a sidelong canny glance as if appraising my trustworthiness, "that I was on both sides in the last war."

I asked him how that were possible and he explained that he had been enrolled in one of the Jacobite regiments in the French service and had fought against us at Fontenoy. Then, wearying of the French service he had deserted in Flanders and gone over to the English side to fight in the Americas. So engrossed did I become in this re-

cital that I forgot to watch the road, when, suddenly, the side of the wagon sank into the mire, our horses swerved and one of the front wheels snapped sharply off.

Ordinarily, this were no great matter and one which any traveler must expect upon our ill-kept Pennsylvania highways; but it chanced that we were well out from the city and far from any habitation. I jumped down, inspected the damage and cursed my Highlander roundly for his carelessness, to which he retorted with some philosophical proverb in Gaelic the import of which was lost upon me and which inflamed my ire. He was utterly without resource and there was nothing for it but for me to plough over the muddy fields to Stenton House in search of a blacksmith. No one was willing to repair a British provender wagon and I must fume through most of the morning until our break was mended. What with the delay and the state of the roads, it was sunset before we finally drew up at the Green Tree Tavern in the German Town, then occupied and garrisoned by part of General Agnew's brigade.

Now for all my vexation, I could not but be aware that fate had played notably into my hands. The pass from Milord Cornwallis only took me to German Town. The outpost to which I had been directed, lay further towards the White

Marsh and it was my hope to keep the escort of the wagon as near to the Continental lines as possible. If I arrived late at German Town, I opined that my chances of being retained with the wagon were stronger than had I come early enough to return to Philadelphia with one of the convoys.

We bedded our horses and had a morsel of food, after which I reported to the sentinel who ushered me into the chamber of the post Commandant, Colonel Musgrave, the intrepid defender of Chew House in the battle of German Town. The Colonel was lolling his lazy length upon a sofa, engaged with a tankard, a long clay pipe and a naughty play by Mr. Wycherly. He evinced little interest in me or my wagon and curtly directed that I be passed on at daybreak.

So far, so good, and it now only remained for me to dispose of my Highland man and as to the manner of this accomplishment I had a definite intention. I sought out the landlord, young Anthony Benezet whom I had known in other days as a tapster boy at the Plough and Harrow, and showed him a broad Spanish piece of eight balanced between my thumb and fore-finger.

"Hast a bottle of right Dantzig for my whistle Tony?"

"Dantzig," quoth he. "Why Master Bingaman, for a broad Joe such as thou showest there you may

command my best Madeira. It is long since I have seen an honest coin," and with a wry gesture he pulled out a roll of orders drawn upon the Commissary General with which the British officers paid their scot. In point of fact these orders were all scrupulously honored but in the early days of the occupation there were grave doubts concerning their value.

I told him that I was for Dantzig liquor, of the strongest, and that my driver and I should like a private room for our wassail. Here, however, he was not to be moved.

"The rooms," he said, "are all commandeered by the red-coated gentry, ye must sleep in your wagon, and as for a drinking place ye may have a candle in the oat closet where there is a bench and table."

"I am not too well pleased, Master Bingaman," concluded the honest fellow, "to see you employed in this manner and with our enemies. I had other ideas of a Philadelphia bred lad of your parts."

I told him that in these perilous times one must even lie with the hare and run with the hounds, and that for this night, since no better place offered, we should content ourselves with the oat room.

That was the weariest evening that ever mortal passed. The chill wind blew through the chinks

and the thin flames of the candle spluttered while my driver drank more than I would ever have believed could be consumed by mortal man at a single sitting. I sipped and watched him while he droned an interminable Lochaber Lament—for he was long past all command of his English. At length, about midnight perhaps, although it seemed much later, he tipsily arose and proposed a Jacobite toast—"Slainth an Righ"—the health of the king. I would fain have asked him which king he meant, whether Stuart or Hanoverian, but just then he lurched and slipped uneasily to the floor. I went out and listened, fearful that his last invocation should attract the attention of the sentry. All was quiet, so I went to my wagon, pulled out one of my store of woolen blankets and covered my Highland man to make sure that his slumbers would be the more profound. Then I lay down myself to spend some restless hours, for I dared not fall asleep.

When I judged that the dawn was near, I arose, hitched my reluctant horses, and drove boldly out into the courtyard. My great risk lay in the sentry missing the driver and asking for him, against which inquiry I had contrived a cunning tale. But the man, a tall Welshman of the Grenadiers, hardly glanced at my credentials, and motioned me to pass out which I did with a degree

of relief, driving northward through the sleeping village. Just a mile above Chew House, and still within the English lines, a lane branches off to wind through the oak woods to join the Skippack pike at a point which I judged to be within the debatable land betwixt the two armies. The road was scarcely more than a lumbering track but I had traversed it in my old fowling days and deemed it passable, and so the event proved, for I found the road, by instinct almost, and guided my horses as best I might betwixt the stumps.

I do not know how long we were traversing the oak grove but the streaks of purple were high over the Delaware Valley in the eastern sky and I was beginning to doubt that I had lost my way when suddenly men sprang out from either side and caught the bridle of my team. One presented a musket, bidding me stand on peril of my life.

"What have we here Mordecai?" asked the one apparently in authority.

"An enemy commissary wagon, Captain," replied a drawling Yankee voice behind me, "laden with good warm blankets, and with a Tory dog to drive it, if I err not."

I noted that the men were attired in buckskin and mounted rude cockades excepting the leader who wore the semblance of a uniform which I judged to be that of the Pennsylvania Line. I

resolved not to make the mistake of taking friend for enemy—as poor André did some years later, which blunder cost him his neck—and, as no questions were asked me, said nothing at all. My hands were tied and I was thrown back on the blankets while one of the men mounted the box and we drove steadily onward. Suddenly the wagon stopped; I heard a confusion of voices and judged we had reached the American lines. No attempt had been made to blindfold me and as soon as I was lifted forth I knew I was at the Broad Axe Tavern on the Norriton Road in the present county of Montgomery. The striped ensign of the Continental Congress was crudely nailed to the tavern sign pole; some forage wains were deployed on the side of the road and a crowd of ragged Continentals were pointing jubilantly towards the captured wagon.

CHAPTER
SIX

The Tavern of the Broad Axe

THE SAME OFFICER WHOM I HAD OBSERVED in the oak grove stepped forward and accosted me.

"Your name, sir and errand?"

I regarded him steadily.

"Sir," said I, "before I proclaim my name and station I would ask an interview, under four eyes, with some accredited officer of the Continental army. You will suffice if your commission warrants."

The officer bowed.

"Colonel Cadwallader of Weedon's Brigade at your service," said he, "but how am I to judge of your good faith? and why am I to accept stipulations from a prisoner?"

"The decision must be your own," said I loftily.

He regarded me with a puzzled expression and then beckoned me to follow him into the house and so to a small room which I had known in other days as the cloak-room. Here he drew and cocked a pistol and laid it significantly on the table motioning me to turn that he might free my hands. When this was done I placed my leg upon the table, to undo my boot and stocking and display Dr. Otto's letter.

"Are you of the Staff?" said I.

"Not so high," said he, staring at my letter, "but for whom is your missive?"

"It is for the worshipful General Peter Muhlenberg and I adjure you to see that it comes properly to his hands for if it miscarries the life of a gallant surgeon of your army now within the British lines in Philadelphia will pay the forfeit."

He laughed in an amazed way.

"Why, sir, if you seek General Muhlenberg, you are in the bit at last, and by the same token it will go the worse for you if you have lied for this tavern chances to be General Muhlenberg's headquarters and the General is but now breakfasting overhead."

"Then take him the letter and I will be answerable for the consequence."

Captain Cadwallader took the letter and left the room. Four weary hours must I cool my heels

before the door opened and a soldier announced that General Muhlenberg awaited me.

John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg was ever an outstanding figure in the history of our province. As a lad, he had been sent by his father the revered patriarch, Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg to study theology in the great seminary at Halle in Saxony, but had presently broken forth from his studies to take service under a sergeant of the British army then recruiting in Hanover, which adventure was to serve him well in his subsequent career. Returning to America, he had taken a charge at Woodstock in the Virginias which displeased some of our High Dutchers, as by doing so, he must conform to the Established rite. Then, as is well remembered, came the call to arms, and Pastor Muhlenberg appeared in the pulpit in full regimentals and led out his flock to join Washington at Cambridge. So was he become the idol of our Palatine population, who acclaimed his prowess as a military leader, and affirmed that he had inherited some of the craft of his Indian grandmother, the wife of Conrad Weiser. My father, to be sure, was wont to revile him as an unworthy son of an esteemed gospeler, and as an unfrocked priest who had forgotten his oath of allegiance and gone over to the rebel rout, but generally, he was

accounted a good soldier and an approved man of public affairs.

The General sat by an open window, on that sultry September morning, with my letter in his hand and the code book by which he had deciphered it open before him. He was a man of goodly presence and pleasing mien, and when he arose, bowed with a courtly dignity worthy of the great Virginian himself.

"Well met, Master Bingaman, and by felicitations upon your fortunate escape."

"My one wish," said I, rather feebly, "is to know how I may be of further service to the Cause."

The General rose, closed the only door of the apartment and pulled his chair close to my own, resuming the conversation in so low a tone that no eavesdropper could distinguish its import.

"I do not know how far you are privy to this vexatious matter but you should realize not only the importance of your mission but also the extreme hazard for he who sups with the Devil must have a long spoon. Dr. Otto thinks—a decision in which I heartily concur—that if we dispatch you presently to Reading you will have wit sufficient to probe this dastardly conspiracy which we are persuaded goes forward there. I may tell you that we have sure intelligence from Albany

that the trap is so set for this playwriting braggart Burgoyne that he cannot possibly escape and that the news of his surrender may hourly be expected. This, ordinarily, were a glorious consummation, but unhappily it may serve only to increase our complexities at York Town where our worshipful Congress is now assembled."

"Why, then, am I sent to Reading rather than to York," inquired I in some wonderment.

"Because the party makes head there which has for its object the removal of our great Washington. The name mostly on the lips of these grumblers is that of Horatio Gates because of his training in his Majesty's forces in the last war. We of the Staff, who can best appraise the qualities of the two men conceive that such a step were tantamount to the re-erection of the hateful fabric of the King's authority in this distracted land. But General Gates' self-conceit is unbounded and if his vanity be further pampered by success in the northern field there are no limits to his ambition. On the other hand, our late reverses at the Brandywine are cited as evidence of Washington's incapacity. And, unfortunately, there are too many in headquarters who spur the sinister suggestion of a change. The brains of this conspiracy is General Thomas Conway, lately in the French King's service and now holding command in our forces.

With him consorts General Tom Mifflin, our late Quarter Master General, now removed and sulking at Angelica, his country seat near Reading. This same town of Reading on the Schuylkill is now crowded with Tory refugees, prisoners and with masterless, discontented men of all persuasions, a likely place for the hatching of a cabal."

General Muhlenberg paused, until I had signified my comprehension, and then proceeded.

"Now as to the part which you are to play—and I must warn you that unless you play it with coolness your life may well pay the forfeit—our design is that you should go to Reading in the character of a Tory prisoner of war, that you should dwell there for a space, mix so far as possible in the society of the disaffected and let us have the news through certain sure channels which shall be outlined to you. This decision has not been attained without due deliberation. While you awaited me this morning I took counsel with Generals Weedon and Sullivan, with Colonel Cadwallader and Mr. Carroll, all tried friends of the Chief. This is their notion as to the most likely plan and they consider you the very man to hoop the barrel."

The General awaited my reply.

"Should I not be denounced at the very outset

because of the manner of my escape from Philadelphia?"

"As a spy upon the British you would be of small efficiency. Cornwallis must already be suspicious, and we have given orders for Colonel Otto to withdraw from the city in case someone may have noted your interview at the tavern in Vine Street. But these men whom you are to observe in Reading are of our own people, misguided it is true, but probably honest in their beliefs. I cannot think that my old friend Tom Mifflin or even this rapparee Conway would stoop to treacherous intercourse with our enemy. But they are become timorous since our late reverses, and believe that a change might be for the better."

"How shall I communicate with you?" said I.

"We have considered that carefully. Here is set down an apt sentiment which you will memorize and then destroy. When these lines shall again be repeated, you may know that he who speaks them is our sure agent."

I looked at the paper which the General gave me and read thereon:

"I had forgot that foul conspiracy
Of the beast Caliban and his confederates
Against my life."

The General rose.

"You leave within the hour by a convoy of Berks County militiamen returning home on leave. Captain Alexander Graydon, lately exchanged from the prison ships in the North River, will be your guide to Reading. I may add that lodging will be assigned to you, and money, so that your manner of life may comport with your assumed station, although, the better to allay suspicion, it were well that you wrote to your father and requested a subsidy. And now good-by lad, and God speed."

CHAPTER
SEVEN

My Journey into Berkshire

When General Muhlenberg intoned the name of Graydon I bethought me of my old skating days on the pond above Mulberry Street where, as a boy, I had admired the grace of this same Alexander Graydon who was acclaimed the best skater in the province of Pennsylvania. These Graydons were associates of the Shippens, Chews and other of our great folk of the Tory interest. Old Mrs. Graydon I recollected as an important woman of fashion who lived in the famous slate-roof house on Second Street. It had been predicted that young Graydon would take a command with the British forces, but instead he joined Washington at White Plains and was promptly taken prisoner at the battle on Manhattan as any one may now read in the diverting Graydon memoirs.

The militiamen proved to be a detachment from Conrad Eckert's Berks County Company whose time of enlistment had run out and who were not to be cajoled or bullied into further service until they had paid a visit to their homes. They were honest farmer folk and I soon saw that there would be little intercourse between them and me as they talked exclusively in German.

A forage wagon conveyed our accoutrements, of which the rear curtains were drawn admitting the light to a pallet upon which lay a wounded officer in the uniform of Shees' Brigade.

"Captain Graydon?" said I.

"The same, sir," said he with a wry gesture as though in pain. "And you I judge are the parole whom General Muhlenberg has placed in my charge. Your pledge of honor not to attempt an escape will save much surveillance both here and in Reading."

"I have no choice, Captain Graydon," said I, "but to give it unreservedly."

"Why," said he, "I am right pleased to hear it for I think you and I will be thrown much on each others resources; so few of these good fellows speak English."

All that day we marched steadily and late in the afternoon got the cast of a boat across the Perquiomen. The soldiers were in high feather

at the thought of going home and sang jubilantly in the low Dutch patois. Mr. Graydon regarded them with doubtful eye.

"It will be the devil's own work to draw them back into the field. The churls fight bravely enough when the enemy are before them but once the battle is concluded their idea is to get back home to the harvest. Our Chief is one of the few who comprehend the importance of keeping an army, no matter how demoralized, in the field. Only with an organized force can we hope for foreign intervention, and without help from abroad I feel the jig is up. But I do not know Master Bingaman, why I discuss these matters with you who are an avowed Royalist."

I started, for so interested had I become in the Captain's discourse that I was by way of forgetting my assumed character. I had no intimation moreover as to how much privity Graydon had in my affairs and therefore made no reply at all.

By this we had mounted the hill on the further side of the Perquiomen and come to a neat stone chapel set in a rural church yard.

"The Trappe Church," said Graydon briefly, "and here, if I mistake not, we rest for the night."

I knew something of the place. Often of a summer evening the great Lutheran gospeller, Dr. Helmuth—the same who later wrote the mov-

ing recital of our great Philadelphia plague—would come to our house in Second Street. And sometimes he had spoken of this out-post of the Lutheran faith in the northern wilderness where the great patriarch Muhlenberg delighted to preach and where indeed he reposes in his eternal slumber.

It was a pleasant place enough on that lovely September evening. Hard by were the comfortable farm buildings of General Muhlenberg's own plantation and to the westward the silvery Schuylkill threaded its way under verdant banks. Directly across the river were the uplands of Chester County were Cornwallis lay after the Brandywine and maneuvered to the perplexity of Washington whose headquarters were once in this same manse of the Trappe Church.

We supped heartily upon some German concoction of meat and kale, and then the Captain and I sat apart and watched out militiamen as they prepared their bivouac with the address of old campaigners, chattering the while in their own peculiar dialect.

"A sturdy stock these Pennsylvania Dutch," said Graydon, "and tenacious withal. One might come into these parts a century hence and find them still wedded to their alien customs and guttural speech."

"How came they to the province in such numbers?" I asked.

"Latterly from the Delaware ports," said Graydon, "where so many ship loads of Redemptioners have arrived in the last quarter of a century that the indenture of a stout farm hand may now be bought for less than the cost of keeping a cow. These immigrants come directly from the Rhineland. But I love to think of the adventure of the first settlers whose journey to my mind was as high an emprize as that of the Pilgrims of Massachusetts Bay. You must know that these rude Palatines, scandalously mishandled by the Patroon Mynheers of the Mohawk Valley, resolved to find a new refuge in the wilderness of Pennsylvania. They cut a road through the forest (God only knows how) loaded their families and effects on rafts and floated down to the mouth of the Swatara, whence they attained to the Tulpehocken Valley where their children dwell. That was a bare half-century since and yet memory fades so speedily that no one now remembers how the bestials were brought along. Some say they were conveyed on the rafts and others that they were driven along the banks. There is an idle tale that the horses, dissatisfied with their Tulpehocken pastures, broke away and emerged months later in their old home at Scoharie. But you will have

plenty of time to observe this folk, for your stay in Reading is likely to be tedious enough."

"What manner of place is this town of Reading?" said I, for I was in reality beginning to be very curious as to my new habitation.

"A very ill assorted place at the present moment," said the Captain. "Ordinarily it may boast of a population of two thousand, a straggling country town clustered about a huge muddy square wherein is centered an ugly stone court house, from which a winding lane leads down to the river Schuylkill. But now, what with prisoners and refugees, the count may run to double the ordinary population and a private chamber is not to be had. There are Tories from the Carolinas, French prisoners taken by Benedict Arnold at St. Johns, Britishers from the Brandywine and Hessians from Trenton. I went there some months ago to visit my mother who is temporarily in residence, and I thought that I had mistaken my way and penetrated to the Tower of Babel, for every tongue of Western Europe is now to be heard in the streets of Reading. However, I may as well content myself of the place since the leeches advise me that my wound will not heal for some months. It is my purpose to read law with my friend James Read the Prothonotary at Reading and mayhap to settle there."

We made an early start, next day, and baited our horses at midday at the White Horse Tavern above Potts Grove, in the ancient Swedish settlement of Morlatton, the seat of the Douglass family. Here we rested for a space by the wall of the church yard where rest the bones of some who settled here before Penn sailed into the Lower Bay. It was a busy scene; muskets and knapsacks were stacked upon the tavern porch and hard by a company of Swedish farmers were being drilled by a militia officer. Graydon regarded the leader attentively.

"I believe," said he, "that there is Colonel Mark Bird of Bird's Forge, my old colleague in the Academy."

The drill ceased presently and Mark Bird crossed over to greet us.

"Welcome to Morlatton," said he to Graydon. "I never thought to see you venture so far from the Market Street, but wars work strange transformations. All of our classmates are in uniform now, some for the Congress, and some, I fear, for King George, but whither are you bound?"

"Our purpose is to reach Reading by the Oley Road."

"I was there yesterday," said Mark Bird. "But what with the press of prisoners and refugees one can scarcely come by a morsel of food or a dram

at a tavern. And now I am ordered northward again, this time farther up the Schuylkill into the mountains of the wilderness of St. Anthony."

"An odd errand for a drill master," said Graydon curiously, "or will you recruit the trees?"

"That is exactly what I shall do," retorted Bird, and from the pocket of his military tunic he produced an official sealed letter which he opened importantly.

"These be tidings," said he, "fraught with much of interest to our cause. I am hereby required to take my company, all of whom are approved axemen, and familiar with the rafting of lumber, and to cut masts for our new Continental Navy. But hearken farther. With the measurements of our own few ships are set down the dimensions of certain units of the French navy now anchored in some port of the West Indies. It would seem that King Louis is at last to declare for us."

Graydon shot a quizzical glance at me as though doubtful whether news of such importance might safely be imparted in my hearing.

Colonel Bird took the hint at once, and the two officers drew aside to continue their conversation in so low a tone that its import was lost to me.

CHAPTER
EIGHT

Oley Forge

All that afternoon we marched northward into the Oley Hills, and never could I have conceived that so fertile and well husbanded a district lay here on the very edge of the Northern wilderness. The fine forests of white oak which formerly abounded had been cleared away to reveal a rich brown loam from which sprang the waving fields of grain stretching to where a serrated line of hills, not dissimilar in effect to the wavering flight of a bird broke the eastern skyline. We were now in the Palatine settlements as one might judge by the huge barns and fine stone houses and by the outlandish jargon of the inhabitants. Graydon bade me observe the diverse dialects of these parts. Low German was the prevail-

ing tongue, but at the White Horse we were in an enclave of Swedes and further up the Manatawny Valley we came into the country of the Bertolets, the LeVans, and the DeBennevilles, Hugenot settlers whose grandfathers had charged with the great Henri at Ivry. Here the loiterers at the farm gates commented upon our array in the French patois.

Our destination, Graydon told me, was the furnace of Colonel Daniel Udree where cannon balls were being manufactured for the patriot army. Our militiamen began to drop off, singly and in groups, as they neared their homes, and at length there remained only the corporal, the driver of the wagon, Graydon and myself. Just at nightfall we came to a rude forge set in a wild upland valley and surrounded by some log houses, from the largest of which stepped a tall spare man in uniform who addressed Mr. Graydon in English, although with a guttural accent. This was the celebrated Colonel Daniel Udree, iron master and patriot who has since so acceptably represented his district in the Federal Congress.

"We had expected you long since," said the Colonel, a thought petulantly, "and the meal has been set."

"We must plead the condition of your Berks

County roads and indeed we are lucky to be here at all," said Graydon.

The Colonel shook his head in a manner which betokened his annoyance at the delay, but assigned to us our sleeping quarters. He evinced towards me a scant courtesy until Graydon whispered a word in my behalf which won me a seat at the table for our evening meal.

Now all throughout our march I must suffer mortification because of the contemptuous indifference of my companions. Had I been a prisoner of war they might have accorded me some deference but no one seemed to concern himself about a smuggling Tory. I consoled myself by reflecting that the more despised my rôle the better might I fulfill my mission and drew some measure of consolation from the thought.

At supper we were waited upon by Hessian prisoners in a uniform which I recognized as that of Knyphausen's old command.

"They are Brunswickers," explained Colonel Udree, "and good craftsmen. I got them from the prison compound at Reading to run my forge; they cost me a shilling a day."

"How do you guard them?" inquired Graydon.

"I do not guard them at all," said Colonel Udree. "Whither would they go? Their garb and speech would betray them before they had

gone five miles. And in sooth the rascals show no inclination to return to Knyphausen and the drill sergeant and the whipping post. Most of them have acquired Berks County *schätzleins* and vow they will settle here and marry when the war is over."

By the fine weather, we sat out upon the house steps, after the meal was ended, and the Colonel diverted us with tales of the countryside.

"They are good folk," said he, "and true as steel but uncouth withal and steeped in old Wendish superstition which they have brought with them out of the Neckar Thal, nor are their manners always of a nicety to suit the taste of your squeamish city folk. Anent which I shall give you a tale of one of our early gospellers."

"These you must know were sometimes of a doubtful breed, men who had donned the cassock the better to hide a doubtful past. Sometimes, too, the Synod at Halle were only too glad to get rid of rebellious students by sending them into the wilderness. Now the tower you observed some miles below here is that of the *Berg-kirche*, the Hill Church and here functioned a surpliced rogue named Reifsnyder whom the synod had sent here for their own relief and our vexation. He was a sad wastrel, if report be true, who was more often to be found in the tavern than in his manse.

Once, while revelling with his cronies he made a drunken wager that on the following Sunday he could, from the pulpit, convulse the congregation in laughter and this without saying a word. The wager was made and, on the appointed Sabbath, he mounted the pulpit, made sure of the attention of his people and then gravely turned to shew that his pantaloons were split up the middle. A crude pleasantry you may opine but you must remember that our good folk are not over delicate."

In the cheerful warmth induced by the good food we were all in humor to laugh loud and long over this quaint conceit which emboldened Colonel Udree to a further tale.

"In the days when the boat loads of Redemptioners came crowding to the port of Philadelphia, a ship's master journeyed up into our county to sell the time of a consignment of Palatines. He bargained off his charges successfully until there remained but one, an Irisher, a blacksmith, so approved in his craft that the master was prompted to ask ten pounds for his two year term, a high price for those days. Now while the master and Redemptioner lay for a space at the lower tavern on the Oley Road, by which ye passed, yesterday, the Irisher a ready-witted fellow, rose early and possessed himself of his own consignment and

credentials. Then at sunrise came one Yoder, a farmer of the district to seek a blacksmith."

"I have the very man," affirmed the Irisher "and his stipend is only five pounds" shewing the while his papers and indicating the sleeping master. So fairly writ were the credentials that Yoder paid down the money and the Irisher, post haste, took the road to Lord Calvert's territories in Maryland from which he might not easily be reclaimed. When the master woke up he had great to-do in explaining to his purchaser that he was in reality no indenture servant."

With like tales did our host divert us until Graydon suddenly remarked that it was midnight and claimed a sick man's privilege to retire betimes. We repaired to our pallets where I tossed fitfully, vainly endeavoring to compose myself for slumber after the stirring occurrences of the day, and as I lay I could catch the refrain of a plaintive Hessian love song wafted through my open window from the barracks where lodged Colonel Udree's prisoners of war. Then I heard an alarm in the court yard, the trampling of horses' hoofs and the voice of Udree welcoming some new arrival. I was dreamily speculating as to whom this belated traveler might be when I fell asleep.

CHAPTER
NINE

The Coming of Conway

At sunrise Graydon and I descended together and found Colonel Udree in close conversation with a tall, dark-complexioned officer in full Continental regalia.

"General Conway," said our host, "this is Captain Graydon of Shees' Brigade" and then, in a patronizing tone to which I had grown accustomed, "Master Bingaman of Philadelphia."

I started at the pronouncement of Conway's name which accorded so opportunely with my own obsessive considerations and regarded the newcomer curiously. He wore a Colonel's uniform, although, like so many of the foreign volunteers who rallied to our flag at this critical time, he had been accorded the rank of Brigadier General by our

too affable Congress, and upon his left sleeve was stitched a golden fleur de lys to betoken his former service in the armies of France. He was well and strongly made and carried himself with a certain grace as one who had known men and cities. The notable thing about the man was that he was never still, but was ever turning in his chair, while his eyes danced as if attuned to his writhing figure. He spoke with a pronounced brogue and his English was that of one who had lived long in a foreign land.

"By me soul Captain Graydon, but I am glad to see you and your friend whose name I did not catch. I'll warrant you are better off here than on the Jersey prison ship. My colleague, Major O'Brien, is but now arrived in White Marsh after a three weeks' imprisonment on that accursed craft. Egad, he vows that he lived mostly on maggots."

Captain Graydon murmured something in deprecation of his past privations and we all sat down to meat, Conway taking the head of the table as though by uncontroverted right.

Since no one, during our repast, honored me with any attention whatsoever, I had plenty of time for observation, and while I sat regarding the newcomer, the query came as to what motive had brought this adventurer from over seas to serve in

our obscure quarrel while I, though native born, must temporize and doubt before taking my stand.

Perhaps Graydon was revolving the same question for he suddenly asked,

"General Conway did you not come to our country with the Marquis de Lafayette?"

"At about the same time," answered the Irishman composedly, "although I landed at Portsmouth on the Amphitrite, and he at Charleston, but before that I was with him on his visit to London. Indade, he might well have fought on the side of the Crown, for he was offered a commission under Gage."

Conway looked about the circle but as we all appeared ignorant of the circumstance he continued,

"Ye must know that his uncle, the old Vicompte, was French Ambassador at London and invited him over for a visit and a bit of diversion. I had served with the Marquis in the Household Troop, and went along to see the land and have a nip of the Surrey ale. We met all the big wigs, Burgoyne, Lord North, Germayne, and much spiteful talk we heard of John Hancock and your rebels at Boston, but the more they fumed, the more willful young Lafayette became to cross the seas and draw his sword on your side. Although when he was safely landed in Charleston, and had ridden up through the tar barrens to your good capital of Phila-

delphia, the reception we got made us half wish we had tarried in Paris. I was with the Marquis when we waited upon the Congress to present his credentials. After we had cooled our heels for two weary days, out steps a pert rogue to explain to us that so many adventurers had presented themselves lately that the Congress could not give a decision on our case without meet consideration and further delay. We almost considered riding over to the British lines in the Jerseys."

And now there was an end of all conversation except in such pauses as the newcomer vouchsafed us. Conway talked nervously and incessantly and made it apparent that he was to accompany us to Reading.

"And right glad I am for company and a guide. Divil a man could I find since Potts Grove who could spake a word of the King's English. When we crossed the Rhine in the old King's time, I picked up a word or two of this accursed Dutch jargon but it has long escaped me. They told me that I would find many here to speak French, but the only rascal who answered me at all in that tongue had so strong a Dutch accent that I was put to it to comprehend his import."

"Your chances of being understood between here and Reading would be still smaller," said Colonel

Udree, "but the driver whom I send with you is German born and knows the way."

All the day before I had come afoot the weary length from Trappe to Oley Forge but now I was hoisted to the wagon seat; Graydon was made comfortable behind, and Conway accompanied us on a sprightly bay mare which he managed with a degree of equestrianship. We drove down the stony mountain track and soon joined the main Oley pike which led westward toward the Schuylkill.

So long as we kept to the narrow road my cavalier must ride behind but once upon the highway he drew up beside the wagon and the flow of talk began again. In an hour I knew all about his campaigns, his accomplishments, his debts and his amours. He was of the "Wild Geese" as those of the better born Jacobite Irishry were called who crossed the narrow seas to draw their swords on the French side, and his father had fought in the Irish Brigade at Cremona and Fontenoy. He himself had been a soldier of fortune all his life and had sailed from St. Nazaire to join the American rebels, prompted it would seem by the attraction of an escapade. I have heard that he was in reality a brave soldier, with some reputation as a tactician, but no one would have supposed this

who heard his rodomantes that morning on the Oley road.

Now while Conway was chattering and curvetting I was casting in my mind as to how I might best turn this incident to advantage. If, as Dr. Otto had hinted, this man were deep in the counsels of the malcontents, if were clearly my cue to fortify myself in his regard. Already I realized the possibilities of my rôle for it was very apparent that my informant would not have been so free of tongue had Graydon been listening. However, the unfortunate Captain, exhausted by his wound and by the racking journey, was dozing uneasily in the back of the wagon, and my companion's loquacity had full play. My old pedagogue, Dr. Smith, told us once, at the Academy on Fourth Street, that nothing is so rare as a good listener and a good listener I became that day. My rapt attention, a well turned compliment and a skillful interjectory here and there, to spur the man's vainglorious self-conceit—I found myself rising steadily in General Conway's good opinion. I was just reflecting that he had told me everything except the reason for his absence from the front at so critical a time when out it all came.

"It's a bit of a lave of absence I am having now to visit me old friend Tom Mifflin who has a place near Reading. I've a touch of the lumbago, be-

side, and Knox gave me furlough. They say that the Dutch girls are kind if one can only palaver with them."

But this loquacity had its bounds, for try as cunningly as I might, I could never bring the man's ranting to the subject of politics. I was wondering if this chatter, were not after all, an effective cloak to conceal more earnest and dangerous intentions, when we came to the summit of a long hill; our driver pointed before him with his whip and ejaculated "Reading." The prospect was so commanding that we paused and even Graydon must drag himself forward to peer over our shoulders.

CHAPTER
TEN

The Arrival

We were in a noble mountain gateway flanked, as it were, by two wooded crests, that on the north being christened for the august Proprietor and that on the south retaining its Indian name of "Navesink," "Good fishing grounds," as Graydon explained, although the vulgar corrupt it "Neversink." Below in the valley lay the village of Reading, its windows glowing in the reflection of the setting sun while beyond the river wound its sinuous way to the savage mountain wall over which lay the barren uplands which the Moravian Count Zinzendorf had quaintly termed the Wilderness of St. Anthony. Even our volatile Irishman seemed affected by the majesty of the panorama.

"A lordly bit" said he, "like the Shannon below Limerick and an evil hour when I ever left the same."

We descended the long slope and came presently to a neat cottage with a garden fringed by a hedge of silver birches. A man in the clerical attire of the English church stood on the doorstep engaged in the singular occupation of nailing up the front door. He turned at the sound of our horses' hoofs and stared past me to where our officer's head and shoulders protruded over the front seat. Graydon voiced a joyful recognition.

"Is not this my father's old friend the Reverend Mr. Murray of the Diocese of Aberdeen?"

The clergyman stared mightily.

"Surely this is not little Sandy Graydon whom I dangled on my knee. And what, sir, is that scandalous uniform that you wear? Is this the fruit of those lessons in loyalty which I instilled into you in your Academy days?"

"My uniform," retorted Graydon, "is the only one which an American gentleman can honorably wear at this time but I doubt, sir, if your cloth will save you from insult when you proclaim your sentiments so broadly."

The clergyman advanced to the wagon, for we had halted during this speech, and shook Graydon's hand, making the while a sorry countenance.

"You are right, Sandy," said he. "The insults which I have suffered in the last few months from these Reading folk who formerly revered me, are such that I care not if I ever see this valley again. Here have I labored since the Society at Westminster first sent me out in the year 1761, and had hoped to erect a godly fabric for Church and King. This house marks the glebe and next year we should have begun with the church. Now come these dire contentions and I must appear before a self-constituted Commission of Safety in Reading to choose between the Congress and the Crown. I shewed them plainly that since King George is the head of our English Church I should be untrue to my vow of ordination if I consorted with his enemies. Whereat they impudently informed me that in consideration of my past good reputation in the community, I might have six months to sell my property and withdraw to the British lines. Some of the hottest headed, I understand, were even for giving me a coat of tar and feathers. However, it is all over. I have but now nailed up the doors of this pleasant mansion where I had hoped to live and die, and I ride tonight to join Sir William Howe at Philadelphia. As for the fair fabric of an established Episcopal Church which I have labored to rear in this god-

less town of Reading; Providence only knows if any vestige shall survive."

There was something so plaintive and withal so noble in the old man's recital of his frustrated hopes that none of us could frame an apt reply. I looked back, at a turn of the road, and saw him standing where we had left him, looking for the last time at his beloved garden and manse. I never saw him again, nor I believe, has he ever returned to his living in Reading, but, years later, in the early days of the fateful yellow plague, I picked up the *Gazette* to note among the stricken the name of Reverend Alexander Murray, Clerk of the Seminary at Aberdeen and late encumbent of the living at Reading. Amongst his papers was found a crayon drawing, made long before, of his projected church in Reading and beneath the legend

"Unthread the rude eye of Rebellion
And welcome home again discarded Faith."

As we came to the open fields which the Proprietor had reserved as outlots and which are still called the Penn's Commons, we had our first tokens of the military occupation. For here were lines of picketed horses being groomed by orderlies in fatigue uniform of the English and Hessian regiments. This I could in no manner understand

until Graydon explained that by arrangement with Sir Henry Clinton some of the captive officers were allowed to keep their steeds.

"The Hessians in particular," said Graydon, not without a touch of bitterness, "ride over the whole countryside at their own good pleasure. I have known them to penetrate as far as Bethlehem. And as for provender, wagon loads of rich vivers and foreign wines are sent out from the British lines on the Hudson, while our brave fellows have scarce the wherewithal to keep body and soul together."

"Bedad, I never saw prisoners comport themselves like these," said Conway. "One might guess that they were garrisoning a conquered town."

And indeed the paroled military whom we now began to meet, strolling out from the town singly or in groups, gave little evidence of the dejection one marked in our Philadelphia prison camps. Their arms to be sure had been taken from them but their uniforms looked fresh and whole, and they bore themselves with an impudent assurance which we found aggravating enough. Conway indicated the insignia of the different regiments as we rode along.

"The tall man is from the Royal Artillery," said he. "The red-faced fellow is a Cornet in the Queen's Rangers. The two rascals with high

shakoes are Brunswickers from Riedesel's command."

We passed the great springs from which the town is served and began to descend the wide thoroughfare known as the Penn Street. No houses had as yet been built on the upper end of this street and where the curbs should have been were lines of racks upon which were dried the great woolen beavers which, then and now, are the staple of the place. The German artificers went to and fro between the racks, intent upon their work and oblivious to the prisoners who stared idly from the thoroughfare.

A hundred paces below the springs, and on the south side of the street, was the outlying hostelry called the Fountain Inn and here the press of workmen and military was so great that we must pause to witness a novel sport. Before the inn, sat or stood a dozen Hessian officers gathered about a table upon which were tubs of the cooling spring water, from which extended long necked bottles of Rhenish wine. In turn the officers were blindfolded and then a spoonful of wine was poured and offered for the taste of the blinded candidate. He turned the liquor for a moment with his tongue and then announced,

"Rauenthaler 1770."

"*Stimmt*," said one of the number who seemed to preside over this strange ceremony.

Another spoonful was offered which seemed to puzzle the taster, who suggested rather haltingly, "*Jesuiten Garten* 1765."

"*Verloren*," shouted a dozen voices and the bandages was torn off with jeers.

"It is a wine probe," whispered Conway. "I have seen the sport while in garrison in Strasbourg, but never expected it in the Americas. And whence do the rogues get this good liquor?"

A ragged Continental who had stood at our elbows during the ceremony took up the reply, "Ye may well ask that," said he, "and the while our poor lads on their prison ships can scarcely come by a cup of fair water."

We continued on our way, the more amazed at the animation of the scene. Before the Bull Tavern there was a cock fight and from the thriving hostelry known as the British Crown came the screech of a Highland bagpipe accompanied by a whistling chorus of the fine old Jacobite tune, "Lilibulero."

"Faith," observed Conway, "the taverns, at least, do a thriving business in this good town. Does no one labor?"

The broad street debouched into a muddy square with a stone court house planted directly in

the center just where my father and Mr. Nicholas Scull had located it thirty years before. The square is unpaved and I should opine never likely to be for it is absurdly disproportionate to the size of the village. About the borders, however, were built crude wooden sidewalks and in the center stood a line of brick market houses.

We inquired for the office of Mr. James Read and were directed to the building called the State House at the northeastern corner of Penn and Callowhill Streets.

A tall elderly man in velveteens, with a powdered wig, stood upon the steps and regarded us doubtfully. Him I recognized as the celebrated James Read, an old companion of my father's, incumbent of most of the county offices in Berks County and erstwhile comrade of Conrad Weiser in his celebrated journey to the Mohawk tribes. Graydon, groaning and protesting, was helped from the wagon and presented his credentials.

"Captain Graydon and General Conway," exclaimed Mr. Read. "Welcome gentlemen. We had expected you yesterday for there has been a runner from General Muhlenberg who announced your coming. It is well that we had some premonition for our town is crowded as you know. However, quarters are prepared for you."

He turned and looked over his shoulder.

"Collinson," he called, "Collinson, where had the Town Major billeted the gentlemen whom General Muhlenberg recommended to our charge?"

I started at this greeting, for I guessed that the Prothonotary was speaking to his son, Collinson Read, who had been with me in the Academy and who had left our school to pursue his legal studies at the Middle Temple in London. I was speculating as to how this recognition might affect my half formulated designs when Collinson Read appeared, studying a scroll which he held in his two hands. He was in Continental uniform although I could never find that he actually took the field and upon his nose were balanced a pair of the horn spectacles which were imported, in those days, from Holland. He read from the scroll.

"Captain Graydon is billeted at the Black Horse," said he. "General Conway and Mr. Bingaman (he looked up and bowed in recognition) at the mansion of Dr. Jonathan Potts."

I instantly perceived that whosoever directed the patriot counsels had seen to it that Conway and I should be thrown together for I could not ascribe this circumstance to mere chance. I should have liked to have tarried for a chat with Collin-

son Read but an orderly appeared and led us across Penn Square and down Callowhill Street to the house of our assignment.

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

The Garrison Village

When Montgomery made his march through the northern snows in 1775 (to the success of which mad expedition the arch traitor Arnold contributed so signally) he had as his Surgeon General, Dr. Jonathan Potts of Reading. This Dr. Potts was regarded as the most competent of our provincial doctors and was an especial friend to Dr. Franklin. When young Potts went to pursue his medical studies at Edinburgh, Mr. Franklin gave him letters of introduction to many of the great folk of the Calendonian capital, to Mr. Robertson, the historian of the Americas, to the Philosopher, Adam Smith, and the maudlin poet, Bobby Burns, who took a great liking to the young medical student and tipsily protested that he would

one day remove to the Pennsylvania woods and write an ode upon the Maiden Creek. Also Potts had studied in London and brought back with him a knowledge of Jenner's new Vaccine against the smallpox which he was the first to introduce into Pennsylvania. At the outbreak of the Revolution he proffered his services and remained in the Continental army until his death in 1781, showing a devotion which could not be ascribed to all of the Berks soldiers. For many of the Reading officers like Major Burd and General Mifflin, were content, after one campaign, to accept less dangerous duties at home.

The Doctor's patriotism was sorely tried by the treason of his brother John Potts of Potts Grove who went over to the British in 1777, thereby forfeiting all his substance, including the lordly country seat at Stowe. This man whose father had founded a thriving village and who had himself lead the easy life of a country squire must remove to Nova Scotia where I have heard that he eked out a doubtful living by the vending of stoves and where his family sometimes lacked for the bare necessities. Men said that the Doctor never recovered from the blow of his brother's defection and that it contributed to his untimely end in 1781. A great man in Israel, this same Dr. Jonathan

Potts of Reading and one of whom too little is recorded.

At the period whereof I speak the Doctor was with General Greene at Potts Grove. The Doctor's wife, so Mr. Read had apprised us, was an invalid who kept much to her chamber and the household was ordered by her daughter Abigail. She it was who opened the door and gave us entrance.

Now, I have no aptness in the detail of feminine charm and, moreover, no dweller in the city of Penn need be curious as to the favor of Mistress Abigail Potts of Reading as she appeared in the year 1777, for, at that time, the great Copley limned her upon a panel which now reposes in Mr. Peale's curious museum in Lombard Street. I go to look at the picture sometimes, from which a good-humored, round-faced girl, with great brown eyes and a shock of flaming hair looks down to me just as the flesh did in those fateful days whereof I write. As to her parts and patriotism, those may the better judge who shall peruse my recital.

On that September evening when Conway and I first entered the house of Abigail's father, she appraised us with the critical eye of one who was used to the coming and going of many transients, and ushered us to our chambers. For so over crowded was the village that all householders must

hold themselves in readiness for compulsory boarders and lucky she who might escape the assignment of a Hessian swine in epaulets, who spate upon the carpet. The Potts' house, being somewhat ampler than the generality of Reading houses, had on the rear second floor two fair sized rooms which gave upon the garden; Conway was installed in the one and I in the other. Our hostess apprised us somewhat curtly that her duties ended with the provision of the chamber but that a tolerable meal was to be had across the street at the Sign of the Bald Eagle, conducted by Everhard Rose, having said which she dropped us a formal courtesy and went upon her way.

I slept well after my journey, and, arising betimes, crossed to the Bald Eagle tavern, to break my fast. The landlord, Everhard Rose, was a clock maker of a sort, albeit surpassed in the craft by his son Danny who hath since furnished time pieces for so many of our quality. Mine host bustled up to inform me that all arrivals at Reading must register with the Town Major, Captain Bowen. I thanked him for the hint, and after my meal, set out for the office of James Read where I guessed that directions might be obtained.

The war had strangely altered the peaceful upland village of Reading. The supposed security of the location had prompted its selection as a

storage place for the munitions of the patriot army. This circumstance would in itself have served to augment the population since a large guard must be preserved, and a quartermaster corps established. Day and night the great Conestoga wains lumbered through the streets bringing in ladings of cannon balls and rifle barrels from the outlying forges of Mr. Patton, Mr. Old, Mark Bird, and Colonel Udree, departing again with flour and clothing for the needy Continental forces encamped upon the Perkiomen.

In addition, moreover, to being a Commissary base, the village was become a hospital center for the wounded of both armies and a prison camp of no small proportion. So as I crossed the square on this first morning of my stay it presented a colorful spectacle and I might mark the tartan of the Highlander, the scarlet of the Line regiments, the green of Tarleton's, and crimson of Lascelles. Sabres clanked, epaulets shone and plumes waved as the captive officers promenaded the long brick market houses.

At Mr. Read's office I was informed that he had just departed for the river for the purpose of overseeing the lading of the flour fleet which, given high water, was starting that day for Philadelphia. Accordingly, I traversed the Square, descended the

steep road which led down through the meadows to Schuylkill, and came presently upon a busy scene.

Now such was the condition of our provincial roads of the period that none of the German farmers in the upper reaches of Berkshire would choose to entrust to wagons the transportation of the harvest if it might be sent by water. So the ford at the foot of Penn Street was usually the place of assemblage for a huge fleet of arks, rafts, and shallops which departed together, upon the advent of high water, discharged their cargoes at the Philadelphia wharves, and were then laboriously pulled back against the stream. Here, too, were the warehouses for the storage of the up-country flour, the wharves for the better mooring of the water craft, and the tavern kept by the ferryman, Nicholas Seitzinger.

James Read was standing upon the tavern steps, his horn spectacles in one hand and a bunch of documents in the other, which latter he waved in punctuation of a harangue which he was delivering to a press of boatmen gathered below.

"And now my hearties, here are your several bills of lading wherein are fairly set down the cargo of each boat, with the name of the master thereof, and of the consignee. Your destination

will be at a point opposite Norriton, for on this voyage ye may not attain to Philadelphia which ye are aware is held by our enemy. If ye are hailed by raiding parties of the Britishers, see to it that ye do upset the boat. Better to lose the flour than for it to fall into the hands of our unfriends. If ye are asked to accept payment in Continental currency, ask ten times the face value of gold. Above all, avoid the wine pot. The rains may come at any hour, and you must keep a clear head for the venture. Drinking, drabbing, and dicing fit no one for the navigation of the Schuylkill."

The boatmen dispersed, and Mr. Read observing me for the first time, beckoned me into the tavern inquiring at the same time if I had had my morning dram. I could not help thinking that this suggestion was scarce in keeping with the recent homily, but followed him into the tavern where Nicholas Seitzinger presently brought us water, glasses, and a bottle of Nantz gin.

The tavern, as was meet for a resort of anglers, was garnished with stuffed trophies of the fishermen's prowess. Shad, salmon, and pickerel were here displayed and Nicholas, our host, pointed with pride to a huge sturgeon which he explained was the gift of the piscatorial Friend Thomas Makin who, in his wanderings, had visited Reading. A board beneath the trophy flaunted the legend

Large sturgeons numerous crowd the Delaware
Which in warm weather leap into the air
So high that (strange to tell) they often fly
Into the Boats which on the river ply.

Whilst I was deciphering this effusion of the Quaker muse, Mr. Read had poured out his gin and held his glass aloft, gloating in the play of light through the amber spirit.

"You drive a thriving trade on the river, Sir," said I, by way of beginning a conversation.

"Only in the freshets of the Spring and Fall," retorted Mr. Read. "Otherwise our Schuylkill is too full of shoals and fish dams. When my friend and kinsman, Dr. Franklin came to Reading, during the French wars, he spent with me the New Year's day of 1756 and busied himself during the entire time of his stay with a scheme for a Schuylkill canal. Cousin Benjamin, as you know, hath an active mind. It was a new experience for him to pose as a military man and to strut about the Reading streets in baldric and bandolier, but it pleased him mightily, and nothing would do but he must sit him down and draw a design for a model frontier fort, which plan, I believe, was afterwards carried out at Gnadenhutten. But you are abroad early Master Bingaman."

I told him the purpose of my visit and he agreed

with me that a permit of residence and card of identification were necessary, since Reading was for the time being, a military post.

"My son Collinson shall accompany you to the Town Major so soon as he shall have settled some matters concerning the lading of our boats. A brave flotilla, is it not, and one which with the help of Providence shall convey to General Washington, within the week, a much needed accession to his larder."

Collinson Read, at his father's behest emerged from the nearby navigation office, securing the while, a bunch of invoices beneath the frills of his shirt front. He seemed pleased with his errand stating that it had been his intention to call upon me that day for a chat about our old days at the Academy.

Arm in arm we ascended to the town by the winding path through the fields, recalling happy memories of the school in Fourth street. Groups of the village residents passed us that radiant morning, shop keepers with belated packages for the flotilla, ragged militiamen eager to witness the departure of the boats, and captive officers, attended by their orderlies, with oars and fishing rods for diversion upon the river. There was an autumnal tang in the air and a steely sparkle in the sunshine. The shadows of the clouds drove high

over the summit of Penn's Mount as if nature and humanity were alike attuned to the cheery promise of forest and sky, silvery stream and sunlit meadow.

Collinson spoke importantly of the duties which devolved upon him since his father had been appointed Commissioner of Admiralty and was so often from home, dilating grandiloquently upon the leading place he was himself to take at the Berks Bar when the imperious Mr. Edward Biddle should have passed to his reward.

I was relieved to find that my companion had been in Reading during the period of my exploit at Trenton and had apparently heard nothing thereof. He was none of your rancorous partisans and took his patriotism in a philosophical way like his fellow Berks Countian, James Ross, whose humorous observation that whosoever might be king he would be content if left with his glass of Madeira, was a standing jest in our Province. Read assumed that I, like young Shippen and young Galloway, had chosen the Tory side, but he did not quarrel with me, therefore, and talked freely about the political situation. Among other things he asked me if I knew that the fugitive Continental Congress had but lately passed through Reading. I told him that I had been in Philadelphia when Mr. John Adams had been routed

from his bed with the news that the British were about to cross the Schuylkill but that none of us knew whither the members had fled, except that their final destination was supposed to be York.

"They passed here two days after their flight from town," said Collinson, "and a sorry figure they made."

This was an engrossing theme. I had heard much sneering talk, in our Tory street, about this doleful progress of the harried Congress and begged Collinson to continue.

"The rumor had come through from Bethlehem that their Excellencies were foregathered there and would shortly depart for Reading. Our folk were wild with excitement and many believed that the Capital would be established here with Congress sitting in our Court House. All were naturally curious to see the dignitaries and the names of Hancock, of Adams, and of Lee were on the lips of all.

Mr. Charles Carroll of Carrollton and Mr. Chase, the Maryland delegates came by way of Potts Grove and were early in town. Mr. Carroll was a spare man of singularly engaging address and rode a blooded mare of his own raising. One of his slaves, a hulking black fellow, rode before and bawled out his master's quality with a degree of pomposity. When the news came that the

cavalcade had passed Francis Parvin's at Ontelaunee, and might hourly be expected, the entire population turned into the square to see the show. There, also, were assembled the more part of the Tories and some captive officers, right glad for so good a subject for their jibes.

It was well on in the afternoon and nearly dark when they rode in, a sorry array to represent the fortunes of a nation, about thirty travel-stained, dejected men on tired horses. The wagon which contained our national treasure, louis d'or, they said which the French King had lent us, led the way with a company of dragoons for escort. In the rear came more wagons to carry the documents of the Congress and the effects of the members. The famous Declaration fairly engrossed on parchment, was borne along in a tin case. Major Pitcairn (late of the Royal Artillery and taken prisoner at the Brandywine) observed that he had never seen a body of men so solicitous about a document which was really a death warrant for them all. I could have wept for shame; for a more pitiful, bedraggled rout of runaways you will never have seen.

My father and Edward Biddle had stationed themselves at the end of Callowhill Street to do honor to the Congress but I thought the worshipful members made but a scant return to their effu-

sive greetings, being the more concerned with reflections as to their supper. My father pointed out to me the more notable of the array.

"Those are the two Lees who ride in front. Francis Lightfoot Lee, he to the right, is somewhat of a buffoon, ever making witticisms as you see, but his colleague, Richard Henry Lee, the tall man who is said to resemble Seneca, is ever grave. The portly man who rides behind them is the great John Hancock and with him are his two Massachusetts compatriots Samuel Adams and John Adams. Samuel will be pleased to know that we have ousted our Reverend Mr. Murray for he is a bigoted Calvinist and loathes the Episcopacy and all its works. The well favored man who rides just behind him is Henry Laurens of South Carolina and with him is Elbridge Gerry."

"And who is the stout man," asked I, "who lounges in the wagon while the rest must ride astride."

"Hush," said my father, "that is Master Benjamin Harrison of Virginia, the most convivial of our delegates, if report be true, and by the same token the goutiest."

"And who is the pock-marked gentleman in preacher's garb who speaks with so odd an accent?"

"He is a Scotchman," said my father, "the Reverend Dr. Witherspoon, late pedagogue of

Nassau Hall. He has been brought to a sorry pass with the smallpox."

Well there was great to do as you may guess to find their Excellencies board and lodging in our crowded town. In the evening my father and General Mifflin and Colonel Brodhead must make a round of formal calls to inquire gravely for the well being of all.

The delegates employed the evening to the bent of their several inclinations. Mr. Samuel Adams strolled up to our Church of the Trinity and engaged in a theological dispute with the pastor, worthy Mr. Moller. Mr. Benjamin Harrison found young Jasper Yeates who had ridden over from Lancaster upon law business, and the two engaged in a rouse at the Bald Eagle. Mr. Carroll wrote letters and John Hancock strolled down to the Schuylkill with Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut.

Next morning, at daybreak, there was a great buzz of preparation and their Excellencies rode out by the Lancaster road to the great disappointment of our ambitious town's people who had hoped that they might tarry indefinitely in our midst."

Collinson's recital brought us to the Town Major's office where I was presented to Captain Bowen, the American garrison commander, and

my card of sojourn duly approved. Collinson bade me adieu.

"You will find enow of distraction, I think, for our town was never so gay, and my father and I shall see to it that letters of introduction are left at your lodgings."

CHAPTER
TWELVE

The Rout at Mrs. Graydon's

And now I pass so glibly as may be over the first days of my stay in Reading. I early received an agitated missive from my father:

"By these Lines I acquaint thee that thy Mother and I are well though deploring the ill luck that attended thy first Efforts in the cause of Loyalty. Business is naught here during the Occupation tho there is much Revelry, too much I fear me, and 'tis whispered that Sir William Howe hath taken Philadelphia but that Mistress L-r-ng hath taken Sir William and rules him with a rod of pickle; more 's the pity. Stand fast to thy Colors, lad, in the Nest of Whiggery whereto thou art so strangely come, leave a Card upon my old

friends Mistress Graydon, and Mistress William Biddle, now Refugees in Reading, and say that I recommend thee to their Hospitality. I enclose thee herewith Five Guineas and thy Mother sends her approved Recipe of dandelion tonic against the Colic."

I wrote that since my enforced parole required an indefinite residence in Reading, suitable apparel should be forwarded so I might while the tedium by making appearance in such society as the place afforded.

My entry into Reading society was indeed no difficult matter since so many of my father's Tory friends were then in the town. Captain Graydon called upon me and announced that he had begun to read law in the office of his uncle, the celebrated Edward Biddle, Speaker of the First Continental Congress. He invited me to attend a rout that evening at his mother's lodgings and I gladly went as I conceived that my mission might best be furthered by mixing so far as possible in local affairs.

Mrs. Graydon, a grand dame of the old school, who ruled the Philadelphia Assembly in the time of Tench Francis and Benjamin Chew, had a house in Queen Street. She had set up in Reading what she was pleased to call her salon and thither re-

sorted many fashionables. Mrs. William Biddle, not to be outdone had set up a similar institution at the Crown Tavern, where she lived, and these two ladies beguiled their exile by vieing for the attendance of such celebrities as the town offered. Local society, accordingly, was divided into two camps, those resorting to Mrs. Graydon being known as the Poodles, while those who were wont to foregather with Mrs. Biddle were termed the Giraffes. Mrs. Graydon's arack was of a quality but all acclaimed the small cakes which Mrs. Biddle made and served to her guests. The American Town Major, Captain Bowen and the captive Colonel McPherson of the Black Watch were usually to be seen at Mrs. Graydon's; but the elegant young Count Von Rantzau (the same who made a lamentable end in 1780 by drowning in the Schuylkill) was oftener to be seen at Mistress Biddle's, so that honors were fairly drawn.

A blackamoor took our cloaks at the door, for Mrs. Graydon loved to preserve as much as possible of the pomp of her Philadelphia salon of other days. As we were ushered into her parlour we found ourselves amidst a press of the fashionable folk of the neighborhood. For beside the British and Hessian officers decked out in such finery as their captivity allowed, there were present many of the county families for whom the stress of

war had left sufficient regalia fittingly to share in an occasion of the sort. The great Berks iron-masters, with their wives and daughters were all in attendance and apparently in the best of humor. They might well be, for their affairs had prospered in the crisis. Colonel Mark Bird, for instance, who had laid aside his Continental uniform for the evening, and was resplendent in a lace Steinkirk, could afford to fit out a company for General Washington since he had amassed so much wealth in the furnishing of cannon balls to the improverished Quarter Master. Colonel Udree was there, staring incredulously at my altered raiment, and with him stood Mr. George Ege, of Charming Forge, to whom the complaisant Congress hired Hessian prisoners at thruppence a week for the conduct of his iron works. The ladies, frankly bewildered by the unwonted display, gaped openly at the uniforms, at Mrs. Graydon's pearl bedizened stomacher, and at Conway's fine French manners.

The iron masters were in eager conversation with a thick set portly man whom I recognized as the printer Mr. Hall, an associate of the great Franklin, and a frequent caller at my father's house. When it had become apparent that the occupation of the city by my Lord Howe was imminent, Mr. Hall loaded his presses upon bullock

carts and made his toilsome way to Reading where he bought a lot on Callowhill Street at the corner of the Square, and set up his establishment anew, to print the depreciated currency of our discredited Congress. As the purchasing power of the Continental bills dwindled so much the faster did Mr. Hall print and issue from his Reading press, until at the time whereof I write the Continental pound had scarcely the value of a gold six pence.

As we were passing the group Mr. Hall caught my sleeve and asked if I throve and what was the news of my family in Philadelphia. I inquired in turn as to how he bore his sojourn in Reading, whereat he shook his head, took a pinch of rapee and began to indicate the local celebrities.

"The man in Continental uniform, seated in the corner, is Colonel George Nagel once sheriff of this county, and now accounted its bravest soldier. He in the brown plush is young Edward Burd the advocate, lately exchanged, and affianced, they say, to the daughter of that arch traitor Edward Shippen, our Judge of Admiralty, who now mixes so brazenly with our enemies in Philadelphia. With them is Captain Joseph Hiester, ordinarily a man of goodly presence but now, as you see, grown wan and emaciated since his term upon the prison ship."

"I have heard of Captain Hiester," said Conway. "My compatriot the Compte de Fermoy of

the Regiment Irlandais fought side by side with him on Long Island."

At the entrance of the further parlour stood Captain Graydon with his mother, our gracious hostess, who received her guests with an air of regal condescension. A lean, gray-haired man, prematurely aged, it seemed, and in a costume patently threadbare, preceded us in obeisance. We noted that he left in Mistress Graydon's hand a blue crystalline cup of fair proportions and goodly form. Conway bowed in turn over our hostess' hand.

"I see," said he, "that Mistress Graydon hath come in the possession of a souvenir of my adopted land. I have served in Lorraine and should know the product of the vitreries of Nancy."

Mrs. Graydon held the glass high for our admiration, and in the glow of the candlelight it sparkled like some giant sapphire. She glanced after the shabby visitor, and then lowered her voice.

"This is not French glass, General Conway, but Berks County Glass, or at least, it comes from near our borders. The gentleman who but now gave it me hath alone the unique secret of its production. His name is Stiegel, Baron Stiegel, as some will have it, although he assumeth not the title. I knew him when he was possessed of lands and

negroes, forges and glass factories, and a fair house at Mannheim, but now he is fallen upon evil days, teaches school in the settlement of John Womelsdorff, and 'tis said that sometimes he knoweth not where to lay his head. And yet he once drove into our Penn Square in coach and six with a trumpeter to announce his coming."

With her forefinger she flicked the delicate glass making it ring with the resonance of a silver bell.

"I could not offend him by a refusal," she explained. "But you must enter, now, my masters, for the readings are to commence."

We passed into the parlour and the entertainment began. Young Ensign Cotswold, formerly of the Fusileers, read from Mr. Congreve's sparkling comedy "All for Love" whereat the young bucks yawned mightily and some went fast asleep. The Freiherr Von Knesebeck, late of Riedesel's regiment, had better success with a German folk song. A sleepy discussion followed.

Now there was ever danger, in these mixed gatherings, that some political disputation might arise which would make for discord and so it proved this evening. We were reviewing the play just read and Major Pitcairn, an approved London Macaroni, to whose taste all deferred, was concluding his criticism.

"And to think that only a year since I saw the

sublime Mrs. Kemble take this very part at Covent Garden. Little did I then imagine that I should be in a barbarous land which neither gives plays nor deplores their absence."

At once there was an angry buzz from the Colonials. Mark Bird roared in incoherent wrath, but Abigail Potts, being, as usual, the more ready of wit took up the retort.

"You forget sir that we have been long in British leading strings; and as for encouragement of the stage, my father has told me that when Mr. Addison's 'Cato,' an innocuous piece, surely, was sought to be given at Philadelphia in 1749 the Secretary of the Honorable Proprietor himself voiced his disapproval of all stage spectacles."

The Major, evidently intent upon more mischief, continued in gibing vein.

"I vow, Mistress Abigail, that if the American generals were as quick-witted in the field as their daughters are at home we might furl our flags and betake ourselves to our ships. But, since you speak of 'Cato,' that might not be an inappropriate play for production in this good town of Reading. If I mistake not it concerns an intrigue for the removal of a Commander in Chief and his supersedal by a lesser known General."

This was letting the cat out of the bag with a vengeance. Many, known to be privy to the Ca-

bal were in the assembly, and General Mifflin and Colonel Brodhead were upon their feet immediately, both voicing an agitated protest. Very opportunely, Mrs. Graydon's blackamoor servant appeared in the doorway and announced the collation. The company at once repaired to the dining room, leaving the two officers still fuming.

"I will write to Knox," sputtered Mifflin. "I will delete this saucy fellow to the Adjutant General, I will recommend close confinement on bread and water for thirty days."

"It is high time indeed," agreed Brodhead "that the arrogance of these islanders be curbed; they impose upon our indulgence. Let a captive American officer essay a like freedom of speech in Falmouth prison camp, and I'll warrant you that he tastes the cat-o'-nine-tails."

But these expressions of discord were presently lost in the strains of Mony Musk from the anteroom, where the arden couples paired off for a contra-dance. Baron Stiegel had found the supper table and was eating his way through the collation in the manner of one who had not tasted food for many hours; Joseph Hiester recited his woes to a sympathetic circle; some of the company engaged in cards. Then claret sangaree was served and the link boys appeared with flaming pine knots to light the ladies home while Conway and I picked

our way along the muddy streets in the darkness. The night was damp and warm, with a threat of thunder in the air. Lights gleamed from the windows of the improvised hospital in the Court House, and were reflected in the pools of rainwater which studded the surface of the Square. My companion, who had taken his share of the Graydon arack, was in loquacious mood and began to tell me of a fête which he had lately attended in Paris, at the house of Madame Duportail.

When we arrived at the Potts mansion we were surprised to see a horse tethered to the hitching post and a man in boots and a long coat stamping up and down before the house. He announced that he had brought a letter for General Thomas Conway of the Continental Staff. I ascended to my room while Conway led the belated messenger into the parlour and lit a tallow wick to read the missive.

I was sitting on the bed speculating as to what this visit might portend when I heard the pair going out from the house and soon knew from their measured tread that they were pacing to and fro in the long garden walk. I considered that it must be news of importance which would take men abroad for a consultation at such an hour and was in a fever heat of zeal to catch its import. Finally I slipped down the stairs, watched until the two

promenaders had turned for their long lap down to the end of the garden and stole stealthily out to hide myself in a clump of shrubbery.

Only once did the couple tarry near as Conway paused to light the long clay pipe which he bore.

"What of the Marquis?" his companion was saying.

"Lafayette?" answered Conway, between puffs. "He hath close ties with Washington, but the offer of a high command might appeal to his Gallic vanity. However, he is at present wounded and is cared for by the Moravians at Bethlehem, so naught may be essayed in that quarter. Benjamin Rush of the Congress is openly hostile to Washington, and even Adams—," the articulation died away as the speaker paced onward down the garden.

My further efforts were all in vain. The conspirators passed twenty times so close to me that I could have touched them by reaching out my hand and yet their speech was so guarded that I could make out only one or two words. There was one name, however, evidently a proper name, which came up several times in their speech, but it meant nothing to me, and finally in despair I watched my opportunity and stole back into the house. I had come so softly that I collided against some one standing inside the door. To my amaze-

ment I saw that this was Miss Abigail who had evidently been stationed there for some time and had not heard my guarded approach. She muttered something in an embarrassed way about having heard voices, and so disappeared.

CHAPTER
THIRTEEN

I Walk Abroad with Abigail

Conway was often from home in these days and I saw him seldom. We sat sometimes, after breakfast, in the garden, for the weather continued fine and warm. I gathered from his talk that he was much with his friend General Mifflin, whose plantation "Angelica" lay across the Schuylkill in the district settled by the Welsh and called Cymri. A change had come over the man since the night when he had received the midnight caller in the garden. He brooded much and was so notably abstracted that I marveled that he could ever have been loquacious. Mysterious visitors kept coming to the door and inquiring for General Conway of the Continental Staff, in particular, one Luttterloh, an ill-omened fellow who lodged at

the Crown Tavern. His had been one of the names set down in General Muhlenberg's list as a suspected Cabalist. I was convinced that some design was afoot and chafed the more at my own impotency. A combination of events, however, was toward which might enable me to prove my mettle; and the first of these was a certain promenade which I made with Miss Abigail Potts.

Since my advent in her father's house, the attitude of Mistress Potts had been one of contemptuous indifference, which was to be expected for I knew that her father's daughter must be a stout Whig and that she could regard me as little better than a traitor. I considered, however, that ordinary decency might have deserved more than the disdainful reserve with which she greeted me at the entertainments to which we were jointly bidden.

Most of the Reading damsels of quality were frankly delighted at the turn of events. The dull routine of a landward market town had been disrupted and the world with so many of its great fashionables brought suddenly to their doors. This made for diversion; and youth is seldom vindictive. It was hard moreover to treat these engaging young captive officers as mortal foes. So that in our picknicks, fishing parties, and rides, no political distinctions were drawn. Hessian and

Britisher, Tory and Continental met in the artless fellowship of youth and high spirits. Only the demeanor of our hostess, Abigail Potts, was a thought more reserved than that of the generality. Any ill conceived quips as to General Washington's ragged array to the southward were sure to evoke a biting rejoinder from the engaging Mistress Abigail.

Now as to the promenade. Abigail, I noted, went daily to the springs at the side of Penn's Mount where flows a medicinal draught of iron water which appeared to benefit her invalid mother. On the morning of which I speak she was half way up the ascent to the Square, an earthen pitcher swung over her shoulder, before I joined her, panting from my labor, and asked if I might be the companion of her walk.

"As you like Master Bingaman," said she in an indifferent tone which she ordinarily employed with me. "I go at the planter's pace as you see and you may be put to it to keep up with me."

It appeared, however, that she abated her speed a trifle as though my company were not wholly disagreeable and we continued on our way chatting with more freedom than had been our wont.

The Court House in the square had been converted into a military hospital and, through the great south doorway we could see the lines of pal-

lets. Outside, in the square a group of woebegone Hessians were bivouaced, breaking their long journey to some prison camp in the Virginias. There had been rumors of heavy fighting in the North country and we guessed that these prisoners were some evidence of Stark's success in the Vermont hills. The towns People pressed up to the convoy and addressed the prisoners in local dialect, to their delight, and to the obvious perplexity of the slovenly tobacco chewing Virginia militia of the escort, who had found some difficulty in making their own wants known in the English tongue.

"You must have seen the passing of many prison convoys," said I, by way of beginning a conversation.

"Very many," said Abigail, "and some great folk among them. I remember when Captain André sat sketching in this very square."

"Do you mean Major André, now aide-de-camp to Sir Henry Clinton in New York?" inquired I.

"The same," said she. "I was passing through Penn Square, early one morning, intent upon the same errand as today when I marked him sitting in the snow sketching the tower of our Court House. As I set up for some deftness in the art, I could not but pause to inspect his handiwork. He asked me as to the news of the countryside and

we chatted for a time. I was more taken with him than with most of these red coats who think of nothing but of ogling and of swilling. He told me of his mother and sister back in Surrey, and how they had saved and spared to purchase his colors in the 27th Foot, and how he hoped to achieve an honorable military career that he might repay them. The rumor went that he had been jilted in love and enlisted in a fit of pique but to be sure he said nothing thereof. He had been prisoner for six months in Lancaster, where he went much into society and consorted with the Yeates, the Shippens, the Burds, and others of our good friends, so we had much in common. I hope that he comes safely through with his campaigns."

"I have heard him spoken of," said I, "as a most amiable officer and one esteemed by friend and foe. But these forlorn Hessians whom we have just seen would seem to betoken that Sir John Burgoyne has been checked in some sort by your General Schuyler."

I knew from Conway's conversation that Schuyler was no longer in command at Albany but it was my thought to estimate the sureness of my companions information. She shot to me a quick suspicious glance.

"General Schuyler is no longer in command.

He has been superseded by General Horatio Gates."

"Late of his Majesty's 60th Foot?" said I, stimulating surprise. "Perhaps the choice is well made for your party. He has had his training in the same school as Burgoyne."

"If he serve the Cause with whole-hearted devotion," said Abigail, as if half in a soliloquy, "all may yet be well. But if he hearkens to the call of vanity his very success may ruin all."

"What do you mean by that?" said I, eagerly pursuing my opportunity.

"Simply that our strength lies most of all in our unity," continued Abigail. "Here has been lately one Duponceau, a Frenchman, skilled in the tactics of the Continent. He journeys to York to join the great Baron Steuben who comes here to instruct us in drill. My father chanced to be at home when he came to Reading and he rested with us for the night. He convinced us that although raw troops are not in a few months to be matched against disciplined veterans who have fought in Flanders, yet zeal and a knowledge of the terrain may do much. But even these, he explained, would be unavailing without unity of command, and unity of command to us in Washington.

"Oh, I shall never forget the July morning in 1776 when our Reading riflemen with Sheriff

George Nagel at their head rode out from this same square to join the army at Cambridge! My father went along as surgeon and all his letters sang of Washington before whose dignity the jealousies of North and South were silenced. If once his command is threatened by the schemes of these mad gentlemen here in Reading, all is lost. But I am not blind. I know why this intriguing Irisher is here at this time and what stress is being brought to bear upon General Mifflin that he may waver in his loyalty to his old commander and friend. However, these are but the opinions of an untutored woman and why discuss them with a spineless ninny who has not the courage to draw his sword on either side."

"At least," said I, stung to the quick, "I am never allowed to forget my delinquencies while I lodge at the dwelling of Mistress Abigail Potts."

"Forgive me," said she. "I feel so strongly in my country's plight, that my tongue wags like a bell clapper but I had no intent to offend you, Master Bingaman."

And she extended her hand with so winsome a gesture that I might well have forgiven a more grievious affront.

We had crossed the square and were proceeding up the Penn Street when, to change a subject which had become embarrassing, I remarked that

my father had helped Nicholas Scull to lay out this very street.

"He planned it much too broad then," said Abigail, "for, as you see, a passage half so wide would well suffice."

In fact the grass grew over most of the thoroughfare and only in the center was there a defined track. We were pursuing our way up this stretch of sward and had passed the hostelry known as the British Crown, still standing at the corner of Penn and Vigour Streets, when a man emerged from the tavern and crossed to join us. He was in fatigue uniform and wore a tasseled cap such as the British Officers affected when in undress, with a fishing rod slung over his shoulder. I recognized the man as young Viscount Barsdale, Lord Uxwold's son, Cornet of the Royal Artillery. His Lordship swung into our pace without any formality of invitation, dismissed me with a cool nod, and began an animated conversation with Abigail. I found myself a pace in the rear and inwardly raging at my abrupt demotion, the more so as my position did not permit me to show my feelings.

"I thought that you had been exchanged, Cornet Barsdale," observed Abigail.

"I go tomorrow," said he "and may the Gods grant I never see these accursed hills again. Three long months have I been sulking here, but in two

weeks I shall be in New York with my squadron."

"I observed this morning, in the Square," said Abigail, a trifle maliciously, "that your Lordship has left some hostages in your place."

"Tush, girl," said the Cornet in great disdain, "what do we reck for the loss of a few Rhineland swine? Burgoyne has taken Ticonderoga and is now below Albany. If I fathom Sir Henry Clinton's intentions rightly he will advance from New York, make a junction with Burgoyne, and there is your Confederacy cut in two. But at least we make no war with beauty and our engaging hostesses in Reading may always expect the royal clemency."

And he bowed to Abigail in his most approved St. James Street style.

"There will be time enough to sue for clemency when the cause is really lost," retorted Abigail stoutly, "and I cannot believe that our condition is so serious as your Lordship imagines."

The Cornet shook his head.

"They are changing leaders and that is usually a sign of impending dissolution. I knew Gates when he was a lieutenant in the garrison at Deptford in 1768, a garrulous knave, with little soldierly capacity. Like the arch traitor Washington, he learned the art of war in our schools only to use his talents against us, but Mr. Washington's

command comes speedily to a close if I am rightly informed."

"Washington superseded," said I, involuntarily, moved beyond power of repression by this astounding intelligence.

The Cornet stared back at me as though he had just become aware of my presence and then continued to my complete effacement.

"The worst of this vulgar rebel rout is that they are ever courageous over the bottle and then they blab. When Cornwallis was at the Head of Elk, and while Washington still held Philadelphia, we had daily intelligence of his intentions from the tapster of the Indian Queen Tavern where the boastful warriors of the American army were wont to foregather and this information brought our success at the Brandywine. Here in Reading is a like condition. For the last week Brodhead and Lutterloh have been going from tavern to tavern, darkly vaporing as to what may happen any hour at General Headquarters. A change of leadership might well be the beginning of the end. I am no friend to Washington but he is a soldier, after all, which is more than can be said of Horatio Gates."

We had come to the head of Penn Street and must branch off by a path which lead upward to the springs at the base of the ascent. The Cornet pointed to his fishing rod.

"I must leave you here, Miss Abigail, for it is my intention to flog, for the last time, a trout stream which comes down through the glen you call the Mineral Spring. It flows down in much the manner that the Esk foams down from the Cheviots. Many a time, during my captivity here have I climbed heavy hearted along the banks and thought of my native Cumberland."

He bowed to Abigail, nodded half contemptuously to me and swung his way along the Philadelphia road, the rod swaying over his shoulder.

We reached the spring, filled our pitcher and then sat down, for a space, to rest ourselves against the return journey. It was a piping Autumn morning, and the clouds threw great shadows over the hills. I sat silent and heavy hearted, in no mood for chatter. Lord Barsdale's talk confirming in me a previous premonition that the hour for some coup was at hand, and yet, for all the service which I had so far been able to render, General Washington might still be drinking Madeira in my father's house in Second Street. My hand rested lightly on the grass when, suddenly, I felt a piece of paper being inserted beneath. I started, looked at Abigail and then at the paper. She smiled and beckoned me to open it. It was the quotation from "The Tempest," the companion piece of the one with which General Muhlenberg

had entrusted me at the Blue Bell Tavern, the token I had so long awaited.

"You," I cried, still incredulous, "a girl."

"A girl, if you like," said Abigail, "but perhaps not the meaner instrument. You set up to be a man, Master Bingaman, and what have you accomplished in all these days at Reading? You may yet be glad for a woman's wit to guide you."

I sat staring at the scroll and could find no words of reply. Abigail shook my sleeve.

"Come sir, the time for action is here. You have dreamed enough. What did you hear in the garden last night?"

"I heard nothing," said I dully.

"What, not even a name?"

"They intoned several times a name which sounded like Harnett."

"Excellent," said she.

"Wherein lies the importance?"

Abigail glanced around. No living thing was near us but involuntarily as it were, she abated her tone.

"My instructions, Master Mark, are to confide in you implicitly. We know reasonably well who the malcontents are in our army but they are powerless without some interest in the Congress. I believe that this man Conway is sent here to form a link between the military conspirators in the field

and those in the Council Chamber. The name which you heard whispered in the garden is that of Christopher Harnett, delegate from North Carolina, and a creature of Gates whom we have long suspected. You now confirm our suspicions. Now hearken to what I am about to say.

"When the Congress passed through Reading, some weeks ago, Harnett was scarcely installed in his chamber at the Bald Eagle, before he must receive a visit from General Tom Mifflin who had galloped in from Angelica with his underling Lutterloh whom we know is privy to the entire plot. They walked abroad under pretense of seeing our Schuylkill promenade and were engaged for some hours in serious talk. So far no one in the Congress has openly countenanced a move to supersede Washington but an open attack may come at any time. If you could discover the names of the Gates partisans at York, and there must be many such, we should be rendering a signal service."

"I believe," said I, "that this plot moves forward from General Mifflin's seat at Angelica. Tomorrow, as you know, the General entertains at cards. Since I am bidden, it may be that by watchfulness, and with the information which you give me, I can find out something of value. But Conway's furlough draws to an end. I had formed

high hopes of my intimacy with him but naught has ensued therefrom."

"I, too," said Abigail, "had expected much from the circumstance of his lodgement at our house but the fellow keeps his own counsel and his plans are ill to fathom."

We tarried for a space, glum and discouraged, gazing through the shimmering September haze at the village and the hills and the sparkling river below. All of our endeavors seemed at that moment so pitifully futile. At last we arose and walked slowly down into the hamlet, I carrying the jar of water.

As we re-entered the Square we marked an unwonted press of towns folk. The Hessians and their convoy were gone but a crowd were gathered upon the Court House steps endeavoring to decipher a bulletin posted by the door-way. In front of the tavern of the British Crown were a knot of eager disputants clustered about Mark Bird, the iron master, who was attired now in complete Continental uniform, appearing far more alert and fit than as I had observed him in civilian attire in Mrs. Graydon's drawing room. He called to us across the throng.

"Hast heard the news? Gates and Arnold have engaged the enemy near Still Water in York State. Burgoyne has lost part of his artillery and

baggage train, and is forced eastward to the Hudson where only a pontoon bridge may save him."

We continued on our way nor was any word exchanged until we reached Abigail's doorway.

"We must make a last essay tomorrow," said she as she took the pitcher, "but in what manner I cannot well define."

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN

Plot and Counter-plot

I took my midday meal at the Bald Eagle and then strolled aimlessly back to the house, still a prey to moody dejection.

Dr. Jonathan Potts' office in the front room remained as he had left it when he rode forth in 1775, to join Montgomery. In the corner were the rifle and powder horn which the militant surgeon had borne in his winter campaign at Quebec. I took up the rifle and examined it curiously, for this was one of those approved weapons whose barrels were cast near this very town of Reading, and which gave our Colonial marksmen so marked a superiority over the clumsily armed British and Hessians that we counted these guns as one of the decisive factors of the war. The horn quaintly

inscribed in verse was the one which the Doctor's father had borne in his campaign with the New England levies in the disastrous year of 1756 when the chastened Puritans searched their consciences for the transgression which had brought them the cruel double reverse of Montcalm's victory on Ontario and the repulse of Admiral Byng's fleet at Majorca.

"This year our Lord hath made us mourn
Oswego's lost and Port Mahon."

Dr. Potts' medical library, acquired in his student days at Edinburgh was ranged in a corner of the bookcase, flanked on the one side by an anatomical skeleton, and on the other by a case of multicolored powders and ungents. Below upon the table lay his prescription book. I picked up this last and began, idly, to turn the pages.

Mark Bird
To blood letting upon negro Cuffy, his household slave. *10S*
Peter Scull
Pieto Nitras x2y 01 Palmi for his wench Flora. *2S*
Joseph Hiester
Elixir Stomachi, 12 grams. *3S*
Phlebotomy. *5S*

Immersed in my researches, I had not observed that anyone had entered the chamber until a deep voice sounded by my ear.

"Art disturbed over thine own health my spalpeen, that ye peruse these recipes so carefully, or is it thy purpose to abandon the surveyor's profession for that of the leech?"

I looked up to see Conway in hat, cloak, and walking sword.

"Will you jine me in a bit of a walk for the bettering of our digestion? This town is well enough for a country garrison, but not the most exciting place in our universe."

This proposal seemed a providential fulfillment of my half formed hopes. I eagerly reached down my hat and stick and we walked up the Callowhill Street and into the Penn Place, tarrying wherever we found diversion.

At the western end of the Square there had been erected the frame work of a boat and the joiners were busily sheathing the hull. It was a huge craft, fully sixty feet long, or almost of the size of our Philadelphia packets which ply between the Capes and Boston. There was something ludicrous in the sight of this unwieldy hulk, careened so high, seventy-five miles from the salt water, in the square of an upland town. These "Reading boats" as they were termed, were of a

reputation, and many skilled boat builders lived in the village.

Near the boat some Scotch prisoners were dancing the Highland Strathspey to the wailing of a bagpipe. The town's folk, in their broad beavers, many still in the costume of the Rhineland, were gathered about the dancers; the captive military, ever keen for amusement, pushed eagerly to the fore, and even the carpenters stayed their labors on the boat to gape at the unwonted spectacle.

In the forefront of the crowd stood two gentlemen who attended eagerly and clapped their hands in unison with the music. One of them I recognized at Mr. John Biddle, the lawyer, Excise Collector of Berks County and younger brother to the great Edward Biddle. His companion was apparently a sea-faring man and an odd figure in that landward village square. He wore a jaunty tasseled cap such as one associates with the water-men of the Bay of Naples. Upon the left sleeve of his pea-jacket was stitched the buff gallon which denoted his rank as a Commander of the Continental Navy. His hair was plaited into a tar anointed pigtail and his complexion had been burned, carbonadoed, as the term went, in the scorching glare of the Spanish Main.

I indicated this nautical personage to Conway who stared in surprise.

"By Saint Patrick," said he, "but that will be my old friend Charles Biddle of Philadelphia Commander in the Continental Navy, whom I last saw in Nantes. He came over to get a ship load of muskets but the French were not ready to give us countenance, and all he got was cold shoulders and averted looks. On top of this he was shipwrecked and lost his craft in the Azores. We'll spake to him."

The gentlemen exchanged affable greetings and we proceeded presently, two by two, up Callow-hill Street to the tavern known as Farmer's Inn conducted by Michael Bright. Conway preceded with the Excise Commissioner while I walked with Mr. Charles Biddle and discovered that he was in command of a privateer of the new American navy and just back from the West Indies, where he had taken three prizes. The instincts of the press gang were patently ever uppermost in his mind and he urged me to sail with him, flatteringly suggesting that a young man of my apparent spirit should not tarry behind the lines when there was work to do.

"The British and Hessians hold the river now," he explained. "Such shipping as we had was burned or fled up the river, and I came here to visit my mother until I can get a new command.

But the North Carolina ports are still open and we can sally out from Beaufort or Newbern."

We found ourselves presently seated about a table discussing a bottle of Michael Bright's good claret. The talk became animated, and now even Conway must defer to the marvelous narrations of Captain Charles Biddle. I was used to sailor's yarns, from boyhood, but these were at once so ingenuous and so humorous that we hung upon every word. The Captain was describing to us his last voyage from the Capes.

"For armament," said he, "you will understand that we had wooden guns, as the Congress had none other to give us. If the prize succumb not to the threat of bombardment we were powerless but they usually hauled down the flag upon the supposition that we had real metal aboard. For crew I had such dregs as the Philadelphia press gang could collect for me. Of seventy men, barely ten had even been to sea before. This scum was all sick before we had passed Chester. Knowing that exercise is an excellent remedy for sea-sickness, I had the hand pump taken up to the top mast and there lashed and everyone who wanted a drink of water was obliged to go up, and after they had taken a drink, carry it up again. For the first week many of them would come on deck,

look up wistfully and then go down again but in the end they all climbed."

Biddle and Graydon had been prisoners at the same time in New York but Biddle, through some mysterious influence, had been unconfined and at large in the city. He told us of his visit to the very prison hulk in which Graydon was incarcerated.

"They brought the dead up every morning," said the Captain, shuddering the while at the recollection, "and left them lie on the grating. I once saw the vile spy Crathorne, who betrayed so many of our Philadelphia lads, go up and spit upon a corpse, damning it the while as that of an accursed rebel. I was in a Coffee House later, in Wall Street, when Captain Budden called me out to tell me that this Crathorne was in town and proposed to sail that night for Jamaica. I hunted him all over the city, being determined to cut his ears off, for which purpose I borrowed a pen knife at the Coffee House, but he had already embarked."

Some remark of the Captain's gave our speech a different trend, the bottle was passed, and suddenly Mr. John Biddle began to speak, as though enunciating some matter to which he had long been giving consideration.

"What good, after all, can come of this ill ad-

vised rebellion, even if by some miracle it should succeed? As an independent state how are we to defend ourselves against the French? And who is to erect the frame of a stable government? Better, even now, to make terms with the King than to set up thirteen jarring Commonwealths without credit or authority."

We stared in silence, overwhelmed by this unlooked for, vehement opinion. Here was Toryism indeed, and yet it was evident that Mr. Biddle was voicing a sentiment upon which he had profoundly reflected. Charles was the first to speak.

"Strike me, John, but these are odd sentiments to come from one who wears the coat of the Congress. If repeated to unfriendly ears they would cost you your Commission."

"I know that Charles," replied John Biddle sadly. "No one loves America better than I. I have served faithfully until now, but I can see no logical goal in this unhappy matter and each of us must reason according to the lights which God has given him."

"I have been recruiting officer for the Congress, as you may have heard, and know the reluctance of our people to serve. I tell you that if only one out of each five capable of bearing arms were to rally to the colors, Washington would have enough

men to beat the combined forces of Howe and Clinton."

"Well," said the sailor brother, "I see no reason for discouragement. I stood in Philadelphia in the State House Yard when the Declaration of Independence was first read. There was little interest and no applause. Some even hissed. But afterwards, many of the knaves who were then so apathetic, marched out under Wayne to strike a blow for the Cause."

This trend of thought was too sobering for further wassail so we paid our scot, and left the tavern, each of us deep in reflection upon what had just been said. Indeed the opinions which John Biddle uttered that September morning in the Farmer's Inn were held by many great folk amongst us, in that trying time. I am persuaded that there is much truth in what Dr. Franklin observed, long afterwards, namely that our independence was the achievement of an influential minority.

Months thereafter, and when I was far from the banks of Schuylkill was brought me the news that John Biddle was missing from the Excise Office on Penn Street and that his embarrassed wife must admit that he had abandoned the Cause and fled into the British lines. He never came back to Reading. When Clinton sailed from New

York, he, like so many more of the Tory conviction, removed to Nova Scotia, and there dragged out a lugubrious existence, biting his fingers at destiny. Nevertheless I can never bring myself to think harshly of John Biddle, for I am persuaded that he acted from no ignoble motive but solely under the spur of a torturing doubt which he had not the fortitude to combat.

As for Charles Biddle, I saw him next in 1794 when that mad Frenchman, the truculent envoy Genet, led his flushed cohorts in tipsy procession up the Philadelphia High Street after a revel at the Indian Queen. In the front rank marched my quondam sailor, mounting the tri-colored cockade, intoning the Marseillaise, and calling *vivas* for citizen Robespierre.

Conway had been drinking rather freely and, when we were alone, he began to comment upon the scene through which we had just passed.

"This cowardly excise fellow is defeated at heart, as is his brother Edward, who was so racked by his accursed doubts that he would never sign your Declaration of Independence. 'Indisposed' his friends say, now. But he was not so sick that he could not have dragged himself to the Hall in Chestnut Street. John Hancock was also 'indisposed' but you will find his signature and station fairly set out for King George to read. These Bid-

dles are either good or bad. There was Nicholas, whom I knew well, who went down with his frigate *Randolph.* He was wounded early in the action and had himself strapped to a chair on the deck. The boatswain came to tell him that the craft was afire and the flames licking toward the powder magazine. 'Fight her to the last then my bullies,' said Nick Biddle and up went ship and crew with the flag flying. But these lawyer Biddles are of a different stock, ever analyzing and doubting. The cause is not lost. Given a good leader and we'll sweep Sir William Howe into the sea and send his mistresses after him."

I thought that I perceived an opening fraught with promise to my plan.

"Sir," said I, "are not the Continentals well led by General Washington?"

Conway let out a string of oaths.

"By the Hill of Tara! How can one serve an automaton? If the man were not so cold and would occasionally unbend we who serve under him, might fight with some élan. But he looks one over in that lofty way of his and gives his directions as a Diety might do. I would have been Major General but for him.

" 'The matter of your appointment must wait, Colonel Conway,' he deigned to inform me, 'until

we shall have had more opportunity of judging of your talents in the field.'

"Had my plaint been preferred by one from his own state, the confirmation would speedily have followed, for as I once heard John Adams say, 'These Virginia geese are all swans.' But I'll have my appointment yet. It may be I will be Major General when Washington will not even be Commander."

In a flash I attained to a comprehension of the motive spring which governed Conway's cause and purpose. The man was bound hand and foot to his own self-conceit. A word of conciliation from the Chief and Conway had served him to the death. But our Virginian, great in so many things, had no gift of dexterity and disdained to win over a malcontent by subtle phrase of flattery. So here was Conway gone over to our enemies, and become the soul of an ignoble Cabal. The thought came to me that I must strike now or never.

"General Conway," said I, venturing my all with a beating heart, "you have shown me much kindness since we first met at the house of Colonel Udree. I weary for action in these stirring times. Can you not procure me a vocation? There is surely some manner in which I might serve you."

Conway regarded me quizzically, as though

the matter of my enlistment in his projects was presenting itself to him for the first time.

"Sage men," said he, "do not make confidants of chance acquaintances of doubtful antecedent, when matters of import are to hand."

"Perhaps," retorted I in desperation, "your straits are such that you must even labor with such emissaries as may offer, be their attainments ever so dubious."

The hardihood of this answer seemed to appeal to the adventurer.

"Our plan moves apace," said he at length, "as is perhaps too generally known, but we need all the help that we can get. I avow that I cannot at present see wherein we might employ you; and yet you are an active fellow and know the country-side"—; he paused, lost in his reflections.

"Look you lad, it is well known that a messenger from General Gates is hourly expected in Reading on his way to the Congress at York Town; for we have won a notable success at Saratoga and it is even possible that Burgoyne has surrendered with his entire army. I have tidings by a sure hand that the messenger will probably be Major James Wilkinson, one of our faction, who dislikes this upstart Virginian as much as we do. This is our hour; but we must proceed warily and consult with our friends in the Congress. Also, a

trusted messenger must ride presently to General Headquarters at Pennypacker's Mills with a list of our adherents and our opinion that the time to strike is here. Then if a concerted movement be launched at once in the Congress and in the Headquarters we may be assured of the resignation of General Washington. We could then see what head the conqueror of Burgoyne would make against Howe and Cornwallis. I, for one, believe he would drive them from Philadelphia in one campaign."

He turned to me, continuing in a great manner of earnestness.

"Master Bingaman, I have entrusted you with matters which, if you betrayed me, would cost me my Commission and it may well be my life, but if you wish to serve us, attend me tomorrow evening to a conference at General Mifflin's seat at Angelica. It has been given out that the General entertains at Spadille, as is his wont, but those bidden will all be of our persuasion and some definite plan will probably be formulated."

We parted and I rushed down Callowhill Street and across the Square, torn by an odd conflict of emotion. I was, it would appear, in a fair way of success in my emprize, and yet my feeling was not that of exultation but rather a sense of shame. Conway, after all, had never shewn me aught but

kindness and it seemed a sorry return to use his confidence so treacherously.

Abigail was waiting for me at the house and we repaired at once to the garden where I recounted all that I had heard.

"I have no heart in this task," I concluded. "Were these men enemies to my land I might perform my task the better but I feel that it is ill usage to betray the trust of one with whom I have so often broken bread."

Abigail, however, aglow in the anticipation of success, would hear naught of my compunctions, being only solicitous as to how we might best use this opportunity. My doubts she dismissed with the curtest of comment.

"Be they Whig or Tory, they strike at Washington and who attacks Washington attacks the Cause."

This view of the case comforted me mightily and my thoughts involuntarily went back to that rainy morning so long ago when Mr. Washington and Charles Carroll of Carrollton came into our parlour on Second Street. I recalled the noble bearing of our great leader and took renewed confidence from the recollection.

"Who attacks Washington, menaces the Cause," I reflected with new-born conviction. I have set

my hand and heart to this venture and cannot now draw back, be the consequences what they may.

Abigail, looking impatiently along the vista which my revelation had opened to her fervid expectation, began to consider what line of conduct I should adopt upon the morrow.

"Those bidden," said she, "will surely be up to their elbows in this dastardly plot. A list of their names must be sent to General Knox on the Perquiomen and then——"

She stopped abruptly as a step resounded back of us and Conway came strolling down the path. He did not appear to notice our confusion but sat down and began to tell us of the floods in the Schuylkill. The scows at the foot of Penn Street must all be drawn up to the Second Street and there chained to trees. The Lancaster ferries were temporarily abandoned and if we were to visit General Mifflin on the morrow we must cross in canoes and find conveyance on the further shore.

CHAPTER
FIFTEEN

'Angelica Farm

At about four in the afternoon of the following day Conway and I mounted for our ride to the lower ferry. Arrived there we found five other gentlemen gathered at the ferryman's house and doubtfully contemplating the swollen stream. I looked curiously at the group of horsemen to see who were to make up our conference.

Lutterloh was there, as was to be expected, and Mr. Hall, the printer, and Brodhead, and that garrulous gossip Jacob Hiltzheimer from Philadelphia who was a creature of Mifflin's—his shadow men sometimes termed him—and a portly man who was presently addressed as Mr. Harnett. I started at this appellation for it was clear that here was the messenger of whom Conway had spoken

to his midnight visitor in the garden. I guessed that this newcomer was in some sort an emissary from the disaffected Congressional faction at York, and that the plot must presently mature.

The ferryman, a dour fellow in broad beaver hat and embroidered waistcoat which he had brought with him from the Palatinate, was declaiming in impassioned guttural. Over and over again he intoned with a degree of emphasis the word "*unmöglich.*"

"What does the fellow mean," said Conway impatiently.

Hiltzheimer, who had some knowledge of Pennsylvania German explained that he wished to inform us that if we crossed the river it would be at our own peril.

After some debate and the offer of a generous fee, the ferryman agreed to undertake our passage. The horses were tethered in a shed nearby and we made a perilous traverse of the stream.

"If the river rise farther during the night," asked Lutterloh of the ferryman, "how are we to get back?"

The fellow shook his head and replied that in such case we were not likely to get back at all, whereat Conway snorted contemptuously and announced that he had crossed the Danube in worse weather.

The Schuylkill at this point formerly made a boundary between the Counties of Philadelphia and Lancaster, this of course, before the erection by the Proprietor of the new district, named for his beloved Berkshire, in 1752. In the old days, lawbreakers on the Reading side would escape the penalty of their crimes by simply crossing the ford and as the town of Lancaster, where a new writ of commitment must be procured, was a weary two days' ride, they were usually allowed to lead a fugitive existence without further molestation from the easy-going Sheriff's deputy at Reading. So the river had become known, in the parlance of the region, as "*Schelm's Fluss*" or "Rogue's Creek."

Arrived at the further side we found that General Mifflin's hospitable care had anticipated our wants and that horses were in readiness for the further journey. These steeds, to judge from their uncurried sides and impromptu saddlery, had hastily been procured from the neighboring farmers and probably served that day at the plow. However, in our bedraggled plight we were right glad to be saved a three mile walk and mounted with alacrity.

General Thomas Mifflin, since three times Governor of this Commonwealth, and reputed the handsomest man of his day, farmed the huge plan-

tation which stretched back from the river to the low range of hills which Conrad Weiser had named "The Flying Hills" from the flocks of wild turkeys which fly from them each Fall.

At the beginning of hostilities, in the Spring of that fateful year of 1775, Mifflin, who was a fervid and forceful orator, had been sent through the Province upon a recruiting tour and had made a stay in Reading. Here he became enthralled by the beauties of the surrounding country and presently purchased the farms of Valentine Eckert at Angelica, adding thereto until he was possessed of a domain of one thousand acres.

The General's military career was at this time in abeyance. He had been high in the favour of Washington and had been entrusted with the victualling of the patriot army. But after our reverses in Delaware it began to be whispered that the cause of our ill fortune was to be ascribed to a faulty commissariat. A scapegoat must ever be found, in such cases, and presently General Mifflin repaired, in high dudgeon, to his farm at Angelica where he remained, through these critical months, railing at those who had caused his retirement.

What I never could determine to my own satisfaction was exactly how far the General was involved in this sinister business of the Cabal. Years

afterwards when he was pitted against General Arthur St. Clair for the high office of first governor of Pennsylvania the people returned him by a notable plurality. And when, in our great President's second term he came to Philadelphia in the August of 1796, it was at Mifflin's house that the President lodged. Perhaps Washington never knew, perhaps no one will ever know, the extent of Mifflin's involvement; or mayhap the President's magnanimity was so sublime that he preferred not to remember that his old comrade in arms had ever wavered. Certain it is that Mifflin was deep in the plot for here were the arch conspirators gathered in conference under his very roof and I, who was to be their tool, bidden to be present.

The windows in the General's brown stone farm house glowed in ruddy squares as he stood in the doorway to bid us welcome when we rode up in the fast failing light of that October day. Within, a cheerful fire roared in the great paneled drawing room. A collation and two punch bowls were arranged upon the buffet which was the handiwork of the great Savery. Cards and dice were arranged upon the tables before the fire and over the mantel appeared the portraits of the General and his wife, painted upon oak panels by Lewis of Ephrata. Mifflin's hospitality is proverbial and

this same mansion of Angelica has since sheltered many of our provincial notabilities, including Governor John Penn, and the Duke de Rochefocauld-Laincount.

Three gentlemen were already installed by the fire and I divined that these were emissaries of the disaffected faction at York who had ridden over for the conference.

We spent the evening in gaming and dice, doing justice the while to an excellent San Domingo rum punch which was of a potency to bring tears to the eyes of a novice like myself. I had no luck at the spadille, although I tried to play cautiously and for a moderate stake. The thought that I was alone in this outlying farm house with a coterie of determined conspirators who might go to any vengeful length if they once discovered my treachery, completely unmanned me. I was sick at heart and longing for the hour of the beginning of the conference.

At length, about nine o'clock, the General's household slaves removed the tables and we gathered in a circle about the fire. Opposite me sat the ill-omened Lutterloh and I felt the man appraising me with no friendly eye. Nor were my apprehensions unfounded for he arose presently and addressed our host.

"General Mifflin, I question no one whom you

invite to your board but before we take up matters fraught with such moment to all our fortunes, I would ask by whose invitation Master Mark Bingaman is present at this conference."

Conway was upon his feet in a minute. He had been drinking heavily and the cards were running against him. I had never seen the man so somber.

"Master Bingaman is here by my invitation and I take the responsibility for his presence. He has volunteered to aid our project and I conceive that he may be of great value."

General Mifflin regarded me in kindly fashion.

"At least," said he, "I can answer for Master Bingaman's forebears since I have known his mother and grandmother in Philadelphia. I vouch for the stock."

Lutterloh nodded sulkily, as though passing a point upon which he was nevertheless unconvinced, and Conway took the floor in a torrent of impassioned invective. I wondered, indeed, how men who set up for any measure of rationality could hark to such a diatribe. He recounted all the mishaps of the patriot cause from the failure at Quebec down to the disaster of Germantown and imputed them all, including the loss of Philadelphia, to the obstinacy and incapacity of Washington. In the course of his speech he employed the phrase

which afterwards became so famous after the publication of the correspondence between Conway and Gates.

"Heaven surely is determined to serve our cause or a weak General and poor counsels had long since lost for America."

As he warmed to his attack I could see that General Mifflin shewed more and more agitation and at length he lifted his arm in a restraining gesture.

"You go too far, General Conway. No one can say that I feel kindly toward General Washington who has brought me to this disgraceful retirement at a time when I would wish to use all my talents in my country's cause. I think, too, that a change of leadership were at once timely and salutary, but General Washington is my old time friend, not under my roof shall his character be reviled."

Here the newcomer, Cornelius Harnett, broke into the contention in an effort to save a situation which seemed to be rapidly getting out of hand.

"We are neither Tories nor traitors," said he. "We are assembled here to consort measures for what we consider to be our country's weal. Let us not waste our time in idle brawls but set hand, soberly, to our task. Our advices seem certain that Gates has beaten Burgoyne. Now who can

tell when his accredited messenger may be expected in Reading?"

Conway responded, "I am informed that the envoy is Major James Wilkinson and that he left Saratoga nearly a week ago. I begin to fear that he has taken another route."

"There is no other route," interjected Lutterloh, "to go to York Town he must pass through Reading. And as to his delay, that is easy to understand. We know that Wilky is a drunken dog who blabs everything when in his cups. Why he was ever chosen for this errand I cannot conceive, but we must even labor with such tools as we have at hand. Now as to my mind the hour of his arrival at Reading were the time to strike. He carries secret missives from Gates to our friends in the Congress. Be he drunk or sober he must be despatched forthwith to York as speedily as his horses may be baited. He should have been there ere this, for his arrival at Reading will be known to our enemies and put them on their guard. Therefore a sure messenger must go at once to our friends in General Headquarters. If in a concerted hour we move both in the field and in the Congress, Gates may, in a week, be Commander-in-Chief and this haughty Virginian back on the Potomac in retirement. Above all, this messenger must be one to whom no suspicion attaches. Whom

shall we send? If you think that Master Bingaman, here——"

He paused, interrupted by the surprising and unexpected noise of horses feet in the courtyard without. The group of Cabalists hearkened also and then gazed doubtfully at each other with the bearing of men who had been detected in some questionable transaction.

"Who can be traveling this unfrequented road at such an hour?" said Mifflin as he rose and left the room.

We could hear him conferring with someone without and then he reentered, explaining in an annoyed manner.

"These Hessian rascals ride about the countryside with far more freedom than is accorded to our own troops. Here are a couple of officers, on parole, from Lossberg's Corps, who have been snaring partridges in the Welsh hills and lost their way. They will enter, for I cannot deny refreshments to travelers in need, be he friend or foe, but their stay need not be long."

Almost upon his heels came the paroled officers, tall blond men in full uniform with white baldricks across their shoulders and wearing high, pointed shakoes. Conway, alone, amongst us, was in uniform and him they saluted with strict military punctilio, afterwards making polite obeisance

to the rest of us. One of them I knew at once, and my heart sank at the almost certain possibility of detection, for this was none other than my old acquaintance Hauptmann Wiederhold whom I had last seen in the field lazaretto by the Delaware on the morning of our Christmas victory at Trenton. He did not recognize me at first for I sat in the shadow, but now he had poured himself a generous glass of rum grog and stood by the buffet while his eyes swept once more about our circle. The fire caught a resinous knot and flared up, illuminating my anxious face.

"*Mein Gott*," cried the Hauptmann, "is not this my friend Bingaman of the American Army who was in the lazaretto with me after that accursed affair at Trenton?"

There was a stunned silence and I sensed the battery of a score of suspicious, angry glances. Even then I might have saved the situation by a clever lie, but I have no bent for dissimulation and could only sit in silence, a miserable figure.

General Mifflin ended an embarrassment which seemed interminable.

"Come sir," said he, "Hauptmann Wiederhold suggested an episode of which we were not apprised. We thought you a Tory refugee. How comes it that you should have served with our forces at Trenton?"

"A spy, by God," interjected Lutterloh spitefully. "I suspected it from the beginning. Probably sent by Knox and Muhlenberg. But for this chance detection our fat would have been in the fire."

I glared at him in my turn.

"You shall answer to me sir for your insolence," said I, impotently, and yet even at that moment I found time to reflect that the fellow had named my vocation only too truly.

Conway arose from his seat and crossed the hearth to confront me.

"Time enough Master Bingaman to indulge in gasconades," said he composedly, "when we shall have come to the truth of this matter. Tell me in one word if you ever served in the Continental Army."

"Yes," said I, pathetically enough.

Conway bowed.

"You spoke just now of satisfaction. That is a matter which I shall personally take in hand at so soon as may be. Meanwhile, since I am responsible for your presence here, I must request that you withdraw from a house which you entered only to betray."

In my dying hour I shall recall that moment of intense mortification, the lowering faces of the Cabalists, Conway flushed with wine and wrath,

General Mifflin dignified and surprised, the Hauptmann staring open mouthed at the consternation which his greeting had occasioned.

I reached down my hat and cloak, bowed to the General and staggered out through the dark hallway into the frosty, starlit night. Mechanically I took the road towards Reading.

CHAPTER
SIXTEEN

Wherein I Re-cross the Schuylkill

THE ROAD STRETCHED CLEARLY BEFORE ME, between the fields, white with the first hoar frost; and in my chagrin I almost ran. My rage and shame arose not so much over the miscarriage of my plan as in selfish resentment of the contumely which had been meted out to me. And my concern for the Cause was momentarily subverted to a blind wrath against Lutterloh. He had called me spy, hireling, Judas. Very well, he should answer for it and that speedily. Conway could wait until I had settled with Lutterloh or he had settled me. The fact that I had small address with weapons and that Lutterloh, for aught I knew, might be skilled in the duello, scarcely entered into my frenzied calculation. I was aroused by the clat-

ter of horses' hoofs on the frosty road behind me and the thought came that if the conspirators were in pursuit I might as well fall here with the ruin of my hopes.

A voice called to me in the high German speech, "*Der Teufel,* Bingaman, where art thou then?" and Wiederhold drew up beside me, his companion riding hard upon his heels.

"Mount behind me," cried the Hauptmann. "They will follow forthwith and our horses are tired."

Mechanically I swung up behind and as we proceeded down the river road at a hand gallop, I recovered somewhat my normal poise.

"If they seek me, it will be at the lower ferry where we crossed this morning. Pull sharply to your left at the next turn, cross the Wyomissing creek and you attain the upper ferry at the Penn Street ford."

My horseman swerved into the crossroad and then pulled sharply up in the shadow of an embankment while the chase rode by, some mounted, and some running, supported by the stirrups of the cavaliers.

"Now for it," whispered Wiederhold and we rode Northward at as brisk a pace as our tired horses would allow, and as we went Wiederhold told me of what had transpired after my depart-

ure. Lutterloth had proposed to apprehend me before I should have left the courtyard but General Mifflin had declared that no man who had broken his bread should be mishandled under his rooftree. During the debate the Hessian officers had stolen out unnoticed.

"Thou shewed me much kindness, *mein Liebster*, that morning by the Delaware," avowed the Hauptmann. "And I would fain make some return. But they will be on our scent and I doubt if our jaded horses can carry us much further."

By this we were at the upper ferry and could see the swollen river racing past us in the starlight. The ferryman dwelt on the Reading bank but there was a rude shed where the wagoners found shelter while waiting for the scows. This ferryman was a Swiss and had brought with him, from his native Underwalden, a huge horn which hung suspended from a tree. It was used as a signal from the crossing but only one with the stoutest of lungs might sound this formidable instrument.

The river Schuylkill, as my father, who had explored its source, was wont to tell, pours down through the mountain wall from that desolate forest country which Count Zinzendorf had aptly called the Wilderness of Saint Anthony. Only hunters of the bear and deer penetrate to this

savage land and some of these bring back with them specimens of that curious carbon which burns with a white intensive heat. Our great Dr. Priestly, who dwells upon the Susquehanna, on the northern boundary of this region, prophesies that man will one day employ the substance as fuel, and it is even said that Dr. Franklin who gave us so practical a wood stove will essay a contrivance for the utilization of these mineral coals; but all this is aside from the purport of my tale.

The town of Reading was never lighted after sunset and we could only approximate its position, but near the bank was the huge frame structure known as the Continental Hall, used as a barracks for the military. In these troubled times, it was always full and bivouacs must be established, outside, for the more hardy. The fires of these encampments burned dully on the further bank and shewed us how far the river was in flood. Indeed, in its swollen state, it suggested our own Delaware at Kensington. Ordinarily there were weirs for the catching of shad, in which the stream abounds, but these were far under water and the river dashed over them, carrying the trunks of huge trees upon its bosom.

"*Was zu machen?*" ejaculated Weiderhold as we reined our panting steeds. "Here is no passage."

He took up the huge horn irresolutely, and then dropped it as the futility of the effort dawned upon him.

The great scows had all been removed to the Reading bank but a skiff or dugout, hewn in one piece from the trunk of a tulip poplar was moored to the wharf. I climbed down the bank to inspect this craft.

"We could try at least," said I, indicating the boat to Wiederhold.

"*Bist du verrückt?* Art thou crazy?" shouted he while his companion officer having guessed as to my intention held up his hands in horror and emitted a torrent of guttural protest.

"Make for cover lad," advised the Hauptmann, "and in the morning find thy way down to the Continental lines. These conspirators mean thee naught but evil."

"I shall settle with them in the proper place and manner," said I, "but it is my intention to make this crossing and that speedily."

The Hauptmann was about to voice a further objection when there came the sound of horses hoofs and a view halloa from the darkness behind us. I rushed down the bank, unmoored the dug-out and paddled out into the river.

At once I knew that I had had small conception of the might of the force of the stream. The

lights of the bivouacs were far behind and I was shooting along, spinning in the eddies, wholly incapable of directing my course. In a vague way I had planned to use the current to waft me to the further shore and trust to good fortune in the essay of a landing, which I soon saw would be no easy matter. And now a new and unrecked danger impended. In my velocity I would shortly be under the shoulder of the mighty Navesink where the channel was broken by rocks, abutting from the stream in normal time, but now below the surface. My watermanly craft told me that if my boat were to strike one of these reefs the force of the collision would capsize me, in which case, I were infallibly lost.

I plied my paddle for very life and managed, inch by inch, to approach the further bank. By this, I was far below the Lancaster ferry and the huge bulk of the mountain towered ahead. Just before me, on the left bank, was a clump of willow trees half submerged, their slender withes swaying in the stream like a huge net. At once I perceived the opportunity which the circumstance entailed and resolved to venture my all upon the cast while some measure of strength was still left to me. Driving my paddle deep, I bore upon it with all my force until the fulcrum so obtained drew me to the left and directly into the bending

branches. Then, just as we were among them, I sprang up, gathering as many of the shoots as possible to my bosom, and my dugout shot from under me.

The limb gave and gave until I was up to my waist in the icy water and thought my hour was come. Then it bent backward, ever so little, and my thighs emerged again. Summoning all my force, I was enabled to fling my right leg about the main branch and, with this purchase, dragged myself out of the water and made a toilsome progress down the bole of the tree. Spent and exhausted I lay upon the bank and had no thought of further effort. Over and over again there came to me the passage which I had so often heard in the old church in Crab Tree Alley, "For surely the bitterness of death is past." I was like to die there from exposure but rallied by some lucky chance to bethink me that only in action lay my hope of a recovery. So I dragged my weary length over the frozen fields, found the ferry road, and just as the streaks of dawn were reddening in the eastern sky, staggered into the doorway of the Potts mansion.

CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN

The Messenger of Victory

GIVEN YOUTH, A CLEAN LIFE, AND A REASONable measure of vitality, one may recover from a blow which were fatal in middle age. About noon I awoke with a consuming hunger and could not at first recollect what had passed or how I found my way, like a homing pigeon, to my lodging. I guessed from the ordering of my clothes that some one had groomed my chamber and, descending the stairs was not surprised to find Abigail awaiting me in the dining room with a steaming repast for my recuperation.

With rare control she waited until I had refreshed myself and then made impatient demand for the details of my adventure. Her disappointment grew apace as I related the spiteful chance

which had betrayed me just when success seemed so surely in my grasp. As to my escape, I merely mentioned that I had found a boat and crossed the river to which episode she gave little consideration, being lost in reflections upon the miscarriage of our hopes.

"So," she said at length, "we are as far, then, as ever, from our goal."

"Further," said I dejectedly enough.

"How so, further?"

"The Cabalists will now know that their design is suspected and will guard themselves accordingly."

Abigail sprang up and began to pace the room as though her emotions were else uncontrollable.

"The oaf! The blundering Hessian marplot! To come upon you at so untoward a moment and ruin everything. And, most vexing thought of all, this Wiederhold has only been in prison camp a few days. He was exchanged after the affair at Trenton, re-captured off the Jersey Coast while bound with his regiment for Savannah and is but now marched over land from Egg Harbor for our mortification. Would that he had gone down with all his equipe."

"He played a man's part last night," said I, "and, it may be, saved my life."

This observation only evoked a snort from my

comely hostess which seemed to betoken that the Continental Cause were but slightly furthered by my salvation. I pushed back my chair and rose to go.

"At least this accursed chicanery is ended, once and for all. Henceforth Muhlenberg and Otto may do their own spying. I have certain accounts to settle in this town of Reading and then, if I am spared, I shall rejoin our forces in the field."

"What accounts?" said Abigail curiously.

"I have this night endured epithets," rejoined I, "which it ill behooves my father's son to stomach. I shall first of all demand satisfaction for these offenses and hereafter serve my country in more manly fashion."

Abigail pushed me back into my chair and caught my arm with a pretty gesture of mollification.

"Come Mark, thou wilt surely not take thy hand from the plow when so much hangs in the balance. Much has developed since you crossed the river to visit General Mifflin. Lord Stirling has come to Reading with direct instructions from the General Staff."

"General Stirling?" said I dully.

"General or Lord, we shall not quarrel over a title. He is sent here to report our progress particularly as rumors of Gates' success continue to

arrive, and our enemies become the more truculent."

"Our 'progress' as you term it," said I bitterly, "is soon told and Gates' victory will shortly be common knowledge. From what I gathered at General Mifflin's, Major Wilkinson may be expected at any hour."

"The more reason why we should forget our private broils. If we had but some positive proof of Conway's defections to shew to the Congress, we might end this traitorous intrigue by premature exposure of its evil purpose. In your intercourse with these conspirators did you never secure any substantial evidence of their design?"

"I was about to be made their confidant and messenger," said I, "in which case memoranda more than sufficient for our proof would have been entrusted me; but my usefulness as a secret agent is terminated. Henceforth I must toil for America in another fashion. I go now to take my council with Mr. Read and Captain Graydon as to the choice of a sphere for my poor talents."

Abigail sighed.

"It is a cruel mortification but I am not yet convinced that no opportunity will offer. Promise to return and meet Lord Stirling who confers with me anon."

"I promise," said I, "and if it be aught of com-

fort to you or him, you may be well assured that the Cabalists are on the further side of the Schuylkill until the water abates, which should be a matter of at least a day and a night."

As I ascended the Callowhill Street I found time for a moment's reflection and the prospect yielded me small comfort. Even if I were lucky enough to escape from the duels in which honor compelled me to engage, I must creep back to the army in a subordinate position, a disappointed and discredited man. My gloomy thoughts served to accentuate my physical ailments for I ached in every joint from the exposure of the night before.

Collinson Read had chambers in the rear of the County Offices on the northern side of the Penn Square. Here he was usually to be found laboring upon that digest of our Pennsylvania laws which has since met with such favor amongst our brethren of the long robe. As I entered I perceived his father, the great Prothonotary, seated at his desk and reading aloud from a letter which he held up almost to the tip of his nose.

"Then fill the trench with two wagon loads of hog dung which has been near two years in gathering and properly saved, a quantity of moss and some fine virgin earth. With this mix dead leaves and trash of the garden buried in the Spring. See

that the dung be right and remember that dung is a medicine that kills with an overdose."

Here the Prothonotary looked up and became aware of my presence.

"Good morrow Master Bingaman. I write as is my daily wont to my old friend Edward Shippen, the Prothonotary at Lancaster, enclosing an admonition of that great gardener and my good friend John Bartram. I always read a letter twice, once for the sight and once for the import. But wherein can I serve you?"

I inquired after Collinson, not choosing to explain my errand as I did not know whether the old man would approve my purpose if he should discover that I was come to bid his son be my second in a duel. However, I was spared the embarrassment.

"Collinson is from home these three days," explained Mr. Read, "upon a visit to Colonel James Burd at his seat 'Tinian' upon the Susquehanna. He were better here for in these stirring times a man is pressed at every hour of the day. What with the Tories and the prisoners, who are sent here for our custody, I have scarcely a moment for my garden. Yesterday came six Quaker rogues, from Philadelphia, who refuse to fight and were sent here under escort. They are all people of substance but they will not lay out a penny and I

must provide lodging for them at the expense of a Congress that cannot pay. In the afternoon comes a man who has a plan for sending fire rafts into the British shipping below Marcus Hook. I must provide a horse at my own expense and send him and his scheme to Colonel Joseph Reed at Philadelphia. Again, last week, there came a frightful explosion and all the Dutch rushed into my office declaring that Lord Howe had blown up our lines at Barren Hill and that the red coats would presently be upon us. I must comfort them as best I might until, two days later comes the news that the British Sixty-Four, Augusta, has blown up in the Delaware and shaken the entire Schuylkill Valley—Trying times indeed."

At the first opportunity I broke in upon the Prothonotary's loquacity and bowed myself out into the street to seek the office of Mr. Graydon.

Captain Graydon was at his desk, and to judge from the profusion of loose manuscript which carpeted the chamber, engaged upon that diverting volume of memoirs which give us so apt a picture of the period in our Province. The Captain began to apologize and to gather up his scattered sheets.

"The briefs do not come in this town of Reading," said he. "I ventured to set out my shingle although not as yet formally admitted to the Bar—

Where, indeed, should I find the run-a-way Supreme Court to admit me?—but no one in this place speaks English and I have not as yet mastered their accursed lingo. Since Neddie Burd rode to the wars there are only three lawyers practicing in Reading but all the clients go to Edward Biddle; sometimes he is employed on both sides. So for the present I occupy myself with my memoirs.

"I console myself with the thought that James Wilson the keenest legal mind in all these colonies practiced law for two years in this village and almost starved. To be sure, he got a rich wife in the sister of Mark Bird, the iron master, but no like opportunity presents itself for me."

I explained my errand and formally requested him to act as my second in a duel with Colonel Lutterloh and General Conway. At this he pulled a grave face and went to stand at one of the windows, gazing out into the square, lost in his considerations. At length he turned and asked me what the quarrel concerned. I was ready for him there and told him it arose from a dispute over the card table. He asked me what experience I had had with the pistol and small sword to which I replied that I had had but little practice with either.

"Then, under favor," said he, "I would opine that your object savors of mid-summer madness. Conway has fought a score of duels in France, and Lutterloh's skill with the rapier is well known."

"So be it then," said I and was about to elaborate upon my chances when we were interrupted by an uproar in the Square, huzzas and the clapping of hands and loud acclaim in three languages.

"God's wounds," such was Graydon's emphatic phrase, "that will be Wilkinson. The vain sot is already five days late. Let us forth to see the show."

He reached down his three cornered officer's hat of the Pennsylvania Line and we sallied out.

The road from Bethlehem enters the Penn Square at its western end by the Queen Street, named after our good Queen Caroline of other days. Here we found a press of townspeople and paroled officers crowding about a singular cavalcade which had just made entry.

In the front rode two of Daniel Morgan's famous riflemen in their linen smocks and fringed leggins, who seemed to act as scouts for three files of Continental cavalry, a rare sight in our army which could muster so few horsemen. Between these groups rode a grotesque figure, a thick-set, rubicund man with deep-set eyes and a red nose. He wore the uniform of a Major, mounted the

cockade of Schuyler's Northern Army in his hat, and carried a despatch case over his shoulder. With his left hand he reined his jaded horse and in his right was firmly grasped a huge jorum of rum flip which some admirer had brought from a neighboring tavern. I looked at the cavalier attentively for I guessed that this must be Gates' belated and long expected messenger.

Major James Wilkinson, for so he proved to be, was ever a stormy figure on our troubled political horizon. John Hancock once said of him that he was true to no one, least of all himself. He was reputed a man of parts and courage but his good qualities were clouded by his volatility and drunkenness which were ever bringing him to the verge of a court martial, where, however, some secret influence in high quarters seemed to intervene to save him. Why he had been picked for his present errand was hard to understand, for he had been chosen for this mission of honor over the heads of a dozen more deserving men. The Major seemed in no hurry to dismount but pulled lustily at his flip and was eager to give details of the campaign, in which recitals his own particular exploits were never subordinated. I reflected that the reason for his delay was sufficiently obvious and that the same scene which we were witnessing had probably been enacted before the doors

of every tavern of importance betwixt Saratoga and Reading.

"Fraser?" he was saying as we approached, and evidently in response to a question from one of the Britishers, "General Simon Fraser? He has paid the piper man. They buried him gloriously on the top of a hill, by the Hudson, with both armies looking on. Eh sirs but he had a grand burial! A pity he could not have held out a few days longer to march to Cambridge under guard. We might even have sent him to this good town of Reading where, it would seem, he would have found congenial fellowship."

Major Pitcairn who stood in front of the knot of captive officers bowed in mock deference.

"If all the American officers fought with the intrepidity of Major Wilkinson I hold our forces lucky to have even been able to leave the Canadas."

The Envoy, however, was exalted to an alcoholic paradise, and scarcely able to appreciate this sarcasm. He seemed intent upon further recitals, and turning in his saddle, called to one of the troopers who carried two long canvas rolls upon his saddle bow.

"Ho there, Ebenezer, unfurl me Red Hazle's battle flag."

The man advanced and Wilkinson having first

with reluctant appreciation drained the beaker, began to unfurl the flag of Riedesel's old command, the regiment of Anhalt-Nassau.

I do not believe that the Hessian officers in Reading, had up to that moment, any real conception of the disaster which had befallen their army, for when the Grand Ducal flag in black and gold was slowly unrolled there was a chorus of dolorous Teutonic expletive.

"Pro Principe et Patria," read Wilkinson with drunken gravity, "which means 'For King and Country' though how a German can be serving either in the province of New York is more than I can conceive."

"They who fought there may have their own notions as to that," replied the irate Major Pitcairn whose composure began to be sadly deranged by this unusual proceeding. Wilkinson glared at the speaker.

"Tell me sir," said he at last, "have you ever had aught of connection with his Britannic Majesty's Twenty Fourth Regiment of Foot?"

Major Pitcairn bowed again.

"I had the honor, sir, to be its ranking lieutenant, in the year 1769, in the garrison at Fermoy."

"Then," continued the Major, "I have by me that which may have for you a savor of famil-

iarity," and he began assiduously to undo the second roll from which dropped presently, in stiff silken folds, the scarlet and blue regimental flag of the Twenty Fourth Regiment.

Pitcairn had stood erect and incredulous during these preliminaries but when he saw the ensign of his old command displayed over the shoulder of Wilkinson's horse, even his self-control was not proof against an involuntary groan. He stepped forward, as if still unconvinced, and took the embroidered scarf reverently in both his hands, regarding the names stitched in gold upon the corners of the banner.

"Blenheim, Oudenarde, Minden, Quebec," he read, half aloud.

"What say?" hiccoughed Wilkinson from his saddle.

The English Major dropped the flag and stepped back a pace.

"I was but recalling the names of some of the battles in which this flag has been borne to its own credit and the glory of the Crown and wondering in what way we might atone for its present disgrace."

Then, clicking their heels with instinctive gesture all of the captive Britishers accorded a military salute to the flag of their defeated army. Wilkinson stared again, and, rolling up the flag

with scant ceremony, motioned to his riflemen to proceed.

"I am traveling to the Continental Congress at York so soon as I may cross the river. Meanwhile I lodge at the tavern of the Bald Eagle, in Thomas Street, and invite all true American hearts to join me in a toast to the glory of General Gates and the confusion of foreign tyrants."

The Dutch inhabitants who had probably understood very little of the previous discourse seemed perfectly to comprehend the import of this last suggestion and broke into huzzas as the cavalcade took up its march.

Graydon pulled my sleeve.

"Let us go," said he. "This scene humiliates me. Had Gates no gentleman upon his staff that he must select this boor as envoy? The fellow is already three days overdue and the news will probably arrive before him."

And such indeed was the fact for when Major Wilkinson finally arrived at York, and it was proposed in Congress to give him a sword, in appreciation of his tidings, Dr. Witherspoon dryly suggested that a pair of spurs were the more appropriate testimonial.

I tried to bring Graydon back to the discussion of the proposed duel but he would have none of the subject.

"No one can cross the Schuylkill for at least two days unless they ride as far south as Edward Royer's ford so the matter may well wait. Beside it were well, lad, that you sleep on the affair. You have not so many lives that you can afford to sacrifice one in so trivial a quarrel."

We parted and I walked across the Square pondering upon the scene which I had just witnessed and wondering how Wilkinson's arrival might affect the designs of the Cabal, and whether Washington's waning military reputation would be able to stand the strain of the new attempt which the Gates partisans would be sure to launch after this brilliant victory in the North.

CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN

The Return of Dr. Otto

I WAS STILL WEAK FROM MY EXPOSURE OF THE night before and sought the stair to my apartment when someone emerged suddenly from the drawing room and a familiar voice called to me.

"What, Bingaman, no greeting for an old friend after all these adventures? And how do you prosper in my home town? Do the shad bite in Schuylkill? And have the Reading maidens proved kind?"

"Dr. Otto!" said I all taken aback at the unexpected apparition.

"The same," said he, "and right glad to be out of that unhappy city by the Delaware where we first met. Cornwallis sent for me so soon as he heard of thy disappearance but the bird had flown.

Now enter here and meet my brother in arms, Lord Stirling, and his aide, Major Monroe."

Two officers arose as I entered and bowed courteously over a table upon which was spread the remains of a repast. William Alexander, or Lord Stirling, as he is more usually termed, was a tall thin man with a curious hooked nose and pronounced Caledonian features. His father, who assumed the rank of Earl of Stirling, was a renowned plotter in the interest of the exiled Stuart King, and must flee from Scotland after the Earl of Mar's abortive insurrection in 1715. The present Lord Stirling, though born and bred in America, spoke always with the Scotch accent. I greatly respected the man for the soldierly qualities which he had shown at Trenton and felt somewhat embarrassed to be introduced into his presence in so casual a manner. The other officer, next presented as Major James Monroe of Virginia, has since been Senator from that State and is said to be a man of great parts and promise.

Lord Stirling drew me a chair, with a high formality of courtesy, and poured me a glass of Madeira.

"Now Mr. Bingaman, we shall be pleased to have a report of your labors."

I looked at him cannily and replied in an indifferent tone.

"I cannot in the least guess to what your Lordship refers."

The General grinned broadly at this uninviting response and turned to Dr. Otto.

"I see, sir, that your choice of a secret agent is well vindicated. Mr. Bingaman is not the man to forget instructions. Major Monroe you may show Mr. Bingaman our credentials."

The Major accordingly fumbled in his despatch case and produced the token which General Muhlenberg had instructed me to require. I inspected it carefully.

"Now sir," said I, "you may begin with your questions."

"I suggest," said his Lordship, "that you relate to us all that has befallen you."

Accordingly, I began to tell of my chance encounter with Conway at the forge of Colonel Udree, of my efforts to ingratiate myself into the councils of the Cabal, of my visit to General Mifflin's plantation, and how my soaring hopes were shattered by Wiederhold's unlooked for entrance. Only when I spoke of my passage over the river did the gentlemen interrupt me.

"*Mein lieber kerl*," cried Dr. Otto, "I glory in you. I should be very proud to be able to say that I had risked as much for the cause as you did last night."

"I had my own neck to save," said I, endeavoring to hide my satisfaction.

"It was a daring deed nevertheless," said Lord Stirling, "and one for which you shall receive due credit, but, tell me, had you no consultant in all these projects?"

I started guiltily. Carried away in the selfish flow of my narrative, I had entirely forgotten what I owed to Abigail.

"My Lord," I cried, "there is one under this roof who surpasses us all in the acuteness of her judgment and if, as I conceive, we are to consort further in this matter I beg that Miss Abigail Potts be at once admitted to our deliberations."

The gentlemen looked at one another somewhat doubtfully.

"I am well acquainted with Dr. Jonathan Potts," said Lord Stirling, "and esteem him highly. I know too that General Muhlenberg has reposed much confidence in this young lady, but whether in formulating further plans we should admit so young a person to our deliberations——"

"Oh, sir," said I, "her counsel is invaluable and the more so as I doubt my own ability to be of further service."

Major Monroe, who being a young man, and a Southerner was delighted by the entry of a comely maiden into the affair began to argue in behalf of

my proposal. The damsel, he said, was already cognizant of the entire matter and had the confidence of those high in authority.

Accordingly, somewhat against Lord Stirling's inclination, Miss Abigail was sent for and entered with a degree of assurance which seemed to me to savor of irreverence in such great company. Major Monroe was frankly delighted at the accession, drew her a chair with a flourish, and we all sat down, although I would have given my right arm for a few hours' repose. I was weary of all this fruitless debate, weary of the Cabal, almost, I thought, weary of my life.

Lord Stirling filled his glass periodically from the decanter—it was the one fault that spoiled an otherwise excellent officer. From the tavern opposite came intermittent volleys of huzzas to betoken that Major Wilkinson was addressing the loyal yeomanry of Berks.

"As I see the matter," said Stirling, "we must secure written proof of intrigue with which to appear before the Congress. Words or the report of words will not suffice. A letter, now, or document, to show that some of the General Staff were plotting for the removal of Washington would evoke enough indignation in Congress to bear us over this temporary crisis. Gates' laurels are now green but, mark my phrase, they will be faded

enow before many months are past. But how to come by this proof, whereof I speak, I am at wits end to divine."

There came a knock at the door and a maid handed in a note for Lord Stirling. His Lordship broke the seal and read aloud from the missive.

"*Major James Wilkinson of the Staff of Major General Horatio Gates, being detained by high waters in the Schuylkill and having just heard that Brigadier General Lord Stirling is in residence at Reading, presents his compliments to Brigadier General Lord Stirling and invites him to sup in his apartment at the Sign of the Bald Eagle.*"

The General threw the note upon the table with a gesture of disdain.

"I shall not go," said he. "It were gratifying to hear the details of the campaign and to learn at first hand how my old companions Arnold and Schuyler and Lincoln have demeaned themselves, but I cannot stomach this vain braggart. I remember well that at Long Island he must almost be dragged into the fray by the ears."

Abigail took up the invitation and regarded it attentively.

"I believe," said she, "that this may give us the very opportunity of which we spoke but now."

My Lord had lighted a long clay pipe and was leaning back in an attitude which suggested his

own comfort rather than the deference due to the presence of a lady.

"Wit way Lassie?" said he in his broad Scotch.

Abigail again indicated the invitation upon the table.

"The flood is our opportunity for it prevents the Mifflin plotters from putting Wilkinson upon his guard. Wilkinson, in his cups, might yield valuable disclosures. The despatch case, now, which he guards so carefully I'll warrant contains more than his formal report to the Congress."

The General blew out a thick cloud of smoke.

"Sealed despatches," suggested he, "from the Commander in the field to the Congress under whom we all hold our commissions may not be tampered with. I have had men shot for a lesser matter."

Here Dr. Otto broke excitedly into the conversation.

"*Um Gottes willen,* Stirling, let us at least make the essay. The girl shames us all with her ready wit. At worst we shall be doing something to the purpose instead of sitting here debating like old fish wives."

"I, too, agree with Dr. Otto," said the Virginian Major, with a courtly bow to Mistress Abigail. "We lose nothing in the trial."

"Well," said his Lordship, "'a wilfull man

maun hae his way,' as my father used to say. If you are all set upon matching me in a drinking bout against Wilkinson I canna weel refuse. I have served America to the best of my poor ability in the field and will not shrink from a test at the wine table. But make your plans now as it may be that later I will be in no condition to aid you; if we secure aught to the purpose, someone must forthwith to Washington's Headquarters with the proof."

"That will be my errand," said Mr. Monroe.

"Your pardon, sir," said I, "but I have led the life of a spy long enough in this fond town. If there is a man's errand to be run I should be the one selected. It is, moreover, my intention to rejoin the active Line and this may be my opportunity."

"The junker is right, Monroe," said Dr. Otto. "He has labored in the heat of the day and if there is aught of harvest he should be the first to announce it. I advise thee, however, Master Mark, to take some repose or thou wilt be of small avail to anyone."

"So be it," said Lord Stirling, rising from his seat. "Advise Wilkinson that I join him forthwith; and when I send word from the tavern do one of you come at once. I leave the ordering of

the details to Mistress Potts, since the scheme is her own."

And his Lordship left the room with a certain alacrity which betokened that the part assigned to him were not after all so repugnant; for he was a true Scot and never averse to a rouse.

CHAPTER
NINETEEN

What Befell at the Bald Eagle

All this passed about seven of the evening, and I knew little more until someone shook me violently and I turned to see the cold dawn streaming through the jalousies, and Monroe bending over me.

"Here is a messenger from the tavern to say that General Stirling commands your instant attendance. Are you reposed?"

"Reasonably well," said I. "Tell the messenger that I wait upon the General at once."

The tavern of the Bald Eagle stood, and still stands for that matter, at the corner of Margaret and Callowhill Streets, diagonally across from the Potts mansion. As I crossed the street, the rain was still falling and I reflected that their Worships

at York Town might have to wait some days longer for the tidings of victory. To my surprise the tavern was brightly lighted and, from the half opened doors came the sound of tipsy revelry. Two maudlin militiamen were disputing at the curb, and, upon the high steps, sat one of Morgan's riflemen, of the escort, his long rifle across his knee. He it was who had brought the message, and he told me that the two officers were in the second story front parlour, volunteering further that he hoped that the debauch would soon end as he had had no slumber the entire night, and had ridden the whole distance from Allen's Town. I entered the long barroom to find the tavern keeper, Everhard Rose, and his wife dozing fitfully in the corner. Their boy Daniel sat before the hearth deftly fashioning the case of a clock, while down the stairway came the butt end of a wavering screed.

"E'en let your Snarlers take their scope
We'll make Britannia civil O
And fight for either Turk or Pope
Or their good friend the Devil O."

Landlord Rose would have detained me but the import of his Pennsylvania Dutch was lost upon me. I shook him off, mounted the steep stairs, and entered the parlour.

At first I could mark but little for the eddying clouds of tobacco smoke. Then, as my eyes grew accustomed to the atmosphere, I discerned a huge vat of spring water with the necks of many bottles protruding therefrom. On one side of the table sat Wilkinson waving a goblet of claret in attempted unison to the song. Opposite, very erect and very pale, sat General Stirling, still puffing at his clay pipe. What attracted my attention the most was the circumstance that each of the gentlement had three golden guineas piled before him. At my entrance, Wilkinson ceased in the midst of his maudlin stave and Lord Stirling opened his eyes.

"Bingaman," said the General, without offering to introduce me to his companion, "you served at Trenton. Who commanded our right in the attack?"

This was a greeting so unexpected that for a moment I could make no reply but finally made shift to say that General Sullivan had been in command with Knox as Brigadier.

Wilkinson pounded with his glass upon the table as one in a frenzy.

"And you will say, Master what's your name, that General Horatio Gates did not hold command upon that day?"

"He did and he did not, sir," said I in some em-

barrassment. "As I understand the matter, he appeared unexpectedly at Washington's Headquarters, was offered a command, and accepted it, then left the army before the action, giving as excuse his obligation to address the Congress, then at Baltimore."

"If he held command I win my wager," replied Wilkinson triumphantly.

"He could scarcely hold command if he were not by," retorted General Stirling.

Wilkinson reflected a moment in drunken perplexity and then flung his three gold pieces across the table.

"Be damned to Gates, anyhow, the white livered poltroon. He is my patron and I must cleave to him for my own advancement but I tell you, Stirling, that had not Benedict Arnold been there, Gates and his army would be in hell, and Johnny Burgoyne would be composing his plays in Albany. And how was he engaged think ye while Arnold was having three horses shot under him at Saratoga? I found him myself, back of the lines, arguing, on the bed of Sir Francis Clarke who had been taken prisoner the day before. I tried to tell him how the day was going but all he would talk about was his disputation. 'Did you ever see so impudent a son-of-a-bitch as Clarke?' said he. 'A fine Commander-in-Chief!'"

Stirling yawned and shot a meaning glance at me; then with a clever affection of indifference.

"How comes it then, that your general has the confidence of Washington?"

"Of whom?" said Wilkinson.

"I understand that General Gates has the approbation and ear of the Commander-in-Chief," repeated Stirling.

"And I tell you," shrieked the Major, in rising cadence of irritation, "that you know not whereof you speak."

"Pardon me, Major Wilkinson," retorted his Lordship, "but we have already had proof that your information is not always accurate," and he began to clink his newly won guineas in a manner singularly aggravating.

I thought that Wilkinson would tumble in a fit of apoplexy.

"Do you give me the lie?" cried he.

"I have made better words good, ere this," said Stirling, "and against better men."

Wilkinson clutched his neckcloth and glared from one of us to the other.

"Is it not enough that I must lose my guineas, but must be taunted in the bargain, by a beggarly exile with a long face and an empty title? Ye speak with the confidence of ignorance. Know then that I have in my pack, messages which

should convince even an obstinate Scotch numskull. How if I shewed you letters from this man whom you term 'Washington's friend' in which he quotes and endorses the sentiments of Conway?"

The Major unslung the despatch box from the back of his chair, unlocked it and threw all the contents upon the table. With unsteady hand he culled forth a letter directed to the Honorable Benjamin Rush of the Continental Congress, opened it, and rose unsteadily to read in shrill falsetto the sentiment which I had heard the night before at the house of General Mifflin.

"Heaven has surely decreed the success of the Continental Cause or a weak general and unwise councillors had long since lost it——"

At this point the Major lurched gently forward and lay across the table with his head in his arms. Stirling reeled to his feet, pale and unsteady.

"Quick Bingaman, reach me the letter. Put the other papers back in the case and call the guard."

The rifleman, whom I had passed below, appeared, and evincing no particular surprise, went to the doorway to emit a peculiar birdlike cry. For Morgan's corps used no trumpets, but signalled, even in the stress of battle, with the call of the wild turkey. A second linen-smocked rifleman presently appeared and the two eased the

Major's neckcloth and bore him into the bedroom.

I supported the General down the stairs where we were confronted by Everhard Rose, whose English had acquired a fluency in the emergency.

"The score," he bawled, "the reckoning, *Lieber Gott*. Six bottles of my best claret."

I flung down the gold pieces which had been the subject of the wager.

"Pay yourself from these and away with you."

It was light by now, although the rain was still falling. It chanced to be a market morning and the early comers, proceeding with their produce to the stalls in the Square, stared mightily. Also there were some ill-omened hangers-on in the street, which liked me ill, as the spectacle of a Brigadier General of the Continental army reeling across the street at such an hour was not edifying.

CHAPTER
TWENTY

Wherein I Assume a Trust

Abigail met us at the doorway in a fever of anxiety, and we all sat down again in the parlour. While the General was ordering his disheveled hair and raiment I took occasion to inform them of what had passed.

"Keep me," ejaculated his Lordship. "My head swims like the Campsie Linn in high water but it maun ne'er be said that a Highland man cannot hold his liquor."

Abigail ignored this observation and inquired, a thought impatiently, as to our next move.

"Well," said the General, "I see the matter will never grow cold while we have this lassie by. Perpare yourself, Bingaman, to ride abroad, and report to me here. And let a basin of cold water be

brought and a knotted towel that I may the better collect my thoughts."

I ascended to my room and made my preparations, inditing the while a hasty letter to my father. When I returned to the parlour I found Dr. Otto and Major Monroe and, to my surprise, Graydon, who was cloaked and spurred, as for a journey. He laughed as he saw me.

"I take it that the matter of the duel can wait; much water has flown over the dam since we last met. Better so, Bingaman, and you will have a whole skin the longer."

Major Monroe bustled in with two sealed missives in his hand.

"This," said he, indicating one of them, "is the Gates letter which Master Bingaman shall have the honor of transmitting directly to General Washington. Are you armed?"

I shook my head.

"The lad shall have my own pocket pistols," said Dr. Otto.

"And my father's walking sword," added Abigail.

Major Monroe proceeded.

"Our last advice is that General Washington is at Pennypacker's Mill on the Perquiomen but you will do well to verify this information from the first accredited general officer whom you meet.

This other paper is your safe conduct through the lines. You are directed to follow the river roads through Potts Grove to Fatland Ford, on the Schuylkill, and then cross the Perquiomen and journey East until you shall pick up the first Continental outpost."

"Sir," said I, "I will go whither you direct me, but were it not the part of prudence to proceed over the Oley Road, by which I came, and so avoid any forraging parties of Tories, or of Cornwallis' cavalry, which may be operating on this side of the Schuylkill."

"If stopped by the enemy you must destroy your despatch and resume your old rôle as a Tory refugee," announced the Major.

"And so lose General Gates' letter," said I.

"You have your orders," answered Monroe curtly. "A good horse will be provided and, as for funds, his Lordship suggests that you use a sum which is but now the subject of a wager between him and Major Wilkinson."

I replied in some embarrassment, that the wager money was no longer available but that I would make shift with my own funds. Lord Stirling had disappeared, to his slumber, I suppose, and the rest crowded around me as I mounted at Dr. Potts' marble horse block, Graydon with admonitions as

to the road and Dr. Otto with felicitations in mixed German and English.

Abigail walked beside me as I paced down the Callowhill Street in the cold drizzle.

"You will forgive me, Mark," said she, in the engaging manner which she could so well adopt when the humor prompted her, "if I have at times let my sharp tongue run away with me. I am so wrapped up in this struggle for liberty that I can scarcely brook delay or difficulty."

"Oh Abigail," said I, "I cannot pretend to your wit, and my ideas come but tardily, for which reason I was perhaps poorly chosen for the present purpose. But, even a painted clock is right twice in the day, and in this town of Reading, I have honestly striven to do my duty; no man can do more. Be that my epitaph."

I bent in the saddle and kissed the two hands which she extended up to me. When I turned at the corner of the street, she was still standing in the drizzle, looking after me.

Mr. Franklin, in my old Philadelphia days, had once repeated, in my hearing, a remark of the sage Dr. Johnson, that no one ever consciously does anything for the last time without a feeling of sadness, and all of these partings brought me into a depression which accentuated as I passed out of the kindly village in which I had spent the

eventful days. But my horse trotted briskly, the sun came up warmly and by the time I had reached the summit of the Navesink I was in high spirits and turned for a parting look at the town and valley. I could distinguish the Square and the tower of the Court House, and the graceful spire of the Trinity, and might guess where lay the gables of Dr. Potts' kindly mansion. The river, I saw was still in flood and I could appreciate the extent of my late peril.

All that morning I rode steadily southward, along the winding river, and avoiding the Great North Road. In my bosom was tightly buttoned Gates momentous letter, together with Lord Stirling's safe conduct through the American lines. What with my progress and the crisp air and the sunshine my hopes were rising steadily, until, for my vexation, the horse threw a shoe. Chafing at this delay, I inquired the way to a blacksmith and finally attained one near the bank of the Schuylkill at a hamlet called Monokasy, almost opposite the forge of Colonel Mark Bird.

I could see the stone mansion, built by the elder Bird, which was a by-word in the county for its stateliness, and the deer park, the formal gardens and the great wharves where the iron was laden for transportation to Philadelphia.

These provincial smithies were usually gather-

ing places for all the idlers of the country side and, knowing full well the inordinate curiosity of my landsmen, I guessed that I was in for a grilling. The usual assemblage of yokels was by, listening to a wounded militiaman, home on furlough, who was imparting the disquieting details of Brandywine and German Town.

"Why tarried ye not to make a stand on the banks of the Brandywine," queried one of the country men who evidently set up to be something of a tactician.

"Why that ye must even demand of my betters," retorted the militiaman. "But it sticks in my mind that I heard that our general feared that Cornwallis might advance up the south bank of Schuylkill and attain to our military stores in Reading, which by the same token, is the very thing he is now about to do."

The debate continued. Washington, the militiaman opined, was somewhere above White Marsh, watching for the next move of Lord Howe. If the British advanced in any force, it was his intention to withdraw the remnants of his army beyond the Susquehanna and organize a new campaign in the Alleghanies.

To these and similar conjectures must I listen while the horse was being leisurely shod, being plied the while with inquiries, in Dutch and Eng-

lish, as to my name, station, errand and for news from the Army of the North. I answered as evasively as possible, with the growing conviction that I was enhancing rather than diminishing the suspicions of my questioners. Fortunately, I noted a Conestoga wagon being laden with flour, and parried the inquiries with some cogent questions of my own as to its destination. Too many of our Pennsylvania farmers were more inclined to dispatch their grain into the English lines, where they were paid in good golden guineas, rather than to take the patriotic course of remitting to the Continental Commissaries, where they received a doubtful return in paper money. As I had suspected, my compatriots at the forge were not inclined to talk upon this topic and we parted in an atmosphere of mutual distrust.

And now I contrived to miss my way in the marshes and found myself at last upon the main highway at Stowe, above Potts Grove, near the countryseat, since confiscated, of the attained Tory, John Potts. There was nothing for it, now, but to push boldly through the town and trust in good fortune to avoid a challenge. I passed the great Potts mansion which Abigail's grandfather had built forty years before, and where Washington had lodged a few weeks since, and finally,

about three of the afternoon, arrived at the Blue Bell Tavern in the High Street.

Our army, which had been in camp near Potts Grove, after the disastrous retreat from Chadd's Ford, had recently moved Southward over the same highway which Graydon and I traversed in our journey from the Trappe, and many stragglers were still to be met with. Before the tavern was a brass field piece with the royal arms of Hanover upon the breech, to show that it had once belonged to the Household Artillery, with a group of militiamen lounging about it. It was some time before I could command any attention in this busy hostelry, and I saw that darkness was impending and that I must stay the night in Potts Grove.

One of General Muhlenberg's parting admonitions, on that morning at the Blue Bell Tavern, had been to mix as far as possible in society, since suspicion attaches to isolation. I supped, therefore, at the commons, at the long general table, and even took part in a debate as to whether the Continentals would have won at German Town had the attack simply masked Chew house and passed on, instead of waiting to reduce it. When the meal was concluded I wrapped my cloak about me and set out for a short promenade.

There are no street lights in our Pennsylvania landward towns, but the twilight still held, and I

had little difficulty in picking my way along the uneven, muddy street, when someone approached me, walking, like myself, in the causeway. There seemed something familiar in the garb and carriage of this lonely pedestrian and I suddenly became aware that it was Lutterloh whom I had last seen at General Mifflin's plantation. I folded my cloak still closer about me, muffling my chin in the collar, and made shift to pass him without greeting. He came on, apparently deep in thought, to pass me without recognition of any sort.

This unexpected meeting so unnerved me that I stood in the middle of the street gazing after Lutterloh's retreating form in a great manner of agitation. To be in Potts Grove at all, I reflected, he must have descended to Royer's or Fatland Ford and then ridden up the Eastern bank of the river. Instinctively I clutched at my bosom to make sure that the precious packet was still there, and then made my cautious way back to the tavern. I had been dog tired the moment before but now sleep and I were far apart as I sat in my chamber, staring out into the courtyard and wondering what I ought to do if the Cabalists were really upon my scent.

For a while I considered calling upon the ranking head of the military in Potts Grove and confiding my packet to him for escort to Washington.

Then the thought occurred to me that this was a matter wherein our own people were often most to be feared. The officer might be a Gates partisan. How should I explain my possession of a paper which had been taken from the accredited envoy of a Major General? I resolved in the end, to make an early start and trust to my own resources to deliver the letter.

An early start, however, was not so easily achieved. The drunken hostler was ill to rouse and then swore that he had mislaid the key to the stables; so the sun was high in the heavens before I rode forth. I might easily have followed the Skippack or Reading road and so come directly to the main Perquiomen ferry, but it was my unique task to avoid both friend and foe. I turned again, with the more reluctance, to the side lanes nearer the river, tortured by the knowledge that in so doing I ran the risk of meeting raiding parties of the enemy. I consoled myself as best I might by the reflection that I was obeying James Monroe's instructions.

At high noon I came suddenly upon the Perquiomen, swollen, like all our streams, by the recent rains. This was at a point nearly opposite to Isaac Potts' Valley Forge where our forces were shortly to make their mournful encampment, but at this time the place was tenanted only by a com-

pany of Connecticut militiamen. I turned sharply to the left, dismounted, and led my horse along a rude bridle path, intending to ask for carriage over the stream at the next farm house. My progress was toilsome, and I was relieved to see a wisp of smoke and to enter presently into a clearing where stood a neat stone farmstead. A scow was moored in the stream and nearby was a man in the uniform of the Virginia militia who stood up at my approach and saluted me with the deference due to an officer.

Now, I wore no uniform, but neither did a full third of the officers of our indifferently equipped army, so I let the fellow persist in his delusion and questioned him sharply as to his absence from the camp. He assured me that he was attached to Weedon's command, had lost his way after a furlough, and now sought to recross the creek and join his company. I had heard at Potts Grove that some units of the Virginia troops had been temporarily assigned to Weedon's Brigade which made the fellow's tale the more plausible. However, it was my cue to trust no one and I resolved to part company so soon as I should be across the ferry.

My militiaman began to complain of the delay. An hour before he protested, in the southern drawl which we Academy boys used to mimic when the

Carolina delegates attended the first Continental Congress in Carpenter's Hall, had he been awaiting the farmer for a promised crossing and the knave still tarried in the corn field. Then he put his fingers to his lips and emitted a shrill peculiar whistle.

"Make not so much alarum, fellow," said I in instant agitation.

"Wherefore not?" said he, "and how else shall I summon the yokel?"

I muttered something about the danger from raiding parties of the enemy to which he answered that I might set my mind at ease on that score since the South bank of the Schuylkill was now held by General Wayne. I could not well explain that I dreaded a patrol of our own forces almost as much as the scouts of Sir William Howe so I contented myself with the observation that the farmer was approaching.

Our farmer seemed not particularly pleased at being called from his fields and suggested that we might proceed to the public ferry below the Trappe. In any event he must have a silver shilling from each of us before he would unmoor the boat. The Virginian promptly produced his fare and I remember vaguely wondering how a soldier returning from furlough should have been prudent enough to have retained any ready cash. We

led my horse upon the shaky scow and the farmer began, laboriously, to pole us across the stream.

On the further side I could see the road, scarcely more than a cow track, mounting the steep bank in a thick grove of locust trees, a likely place, I considered, for an ambuscade. Resolving to take no chances I mounted my horse while in mid-stream, which procedure displeased the boatman and seemed greatly to puzzle the soldier. However, when we reached the bank he led my horse ashore and assisted him with the bridle to mount the slope. The ferryman, as though glad to be rid of us, had shoved out into the stream. I called to the militiaman in a tone of authority.

"I thank you for your kind offices, but will now proceed upon my own course."

"I will even help your Worship up the bank," answered the fellow.

At once I drew my pistol and cocked it, whereat the militiaman bore heavily on the bit and threw my horse back upon his haunches, giving at the same time the peculiar signal which he had sounded by the house of the ferryman.

I pulled the trigger without a moment's hesitation and the fellow went down with a shriek. Before me I saw the forms of men among the locusts and heard answering greetings. There was no retreat for it now and I spurred my horse up the

bank and squarely into a hempen barrier stretched across the road. We went down together and before I could rise three men pinioned me to the ground and another caught my horse. In a trice they had disarmed me and trussed me hand and foot with stout twine. I was partly stunned by the fall and affected to be entirely so.

A horseman galloped up and, between my half closed lids, I recognized Lutterloh.

"Is he fast?" was his first inquiry.

"Trussed like a Yorkshire porker," said one of my captors, "but your bird led us a pretty chase. Here have we been patrolling the stream since sun-rise and now poor Sharpless is down with a ball through his shoulder."

"Put him on Bingaman's horse and give me space there that I may examine the prisoner."

Lutterloh deftly examined my attire and presently drew out the packet from my bosom with an exultant cry.

"Our commission is executed," said he. "Gag this blundering jackanapes and roll him into the thicket."

"The man will die there," protested one of those who had tied me.

"He showed little tenderness for us, but now, when he shot down Tony Sharpless," retorted Lut-

terloh. "But the ferryman will have heard the alarum and so find him. As for us, it behooves to be on our way."

CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE

Wherein I Execute My Commission

I MUST HAVE SWOONED AFTER THEY HAD LEFT me for I remember regaining partial consciousness to wonder if I were to die in that damp thicket. Then, as in a dream, I saw a man looking down upon me and recognized the ferryman. He removed my gag, cut the cords and asked me stupidly enough what had passed. I was too weak to berate him for not coming to my aid but asked for a drink of strong waters and the loan of a horse.

He poled across the stream and I sat up in tragic case to consider what I had best do. This last stroke, coming after my previous miscarriage, completely unnerved me. The encounter at Potts Grove had, after all, not been a chance one. I

made little doubt that I had been watched ever since my departure from Reading and that had I essayed the crossing of the Perquiomen at any other ferry I should have found a like crafty ambush prepared for me. Now I had lost all, even the right to prefer a plaint, for how should I explain the absence of valuable papers when I could give no good account of how they were come by? Bitterly did I curse the obstinacy of the bungling Virginia Major who had sent me by this devious and dangerous way. Had I proceeded by the Great Oley Road, as I had suggested, it was probable that my papers would have been by this time safely delivered. And now I must again admit a failure. What, too, if my tale were discredited and I were accused of truckling with the Cabal? For a space I even debated recrossing the Schuylkill and relying upon fate to guide me back to my father's house in Philadelphia. Then Doctor Otto's honest visage rose before me, as he so trustingly bade me God speed at the mounting block in Reading; I resolved to make my report, be the hazard what it might. The boatman returned, none too speedily, with a mule which he had withdrawn from the plow and crudely saddled. I swallowed a draught of apple brandy and was for setting off at once but the boatman pro-

ceeded cunningly to chaffer, demanding whither I proposed going and what was to be his pay.

"Every day," complained he, "a brawl is made on some part of my farm. Whig and Tory, Britisher, Hessian and Continental ride over my crops, drive my cows and fire my stacks. It is high time that I laid by something for myself out of all this pother."

I told him I was for Norriton Four Corners by the shortest road, there to inquire for the headquarters of General Washington.

The ferryman considered the matter and concluded that eight shillings were not too much for the gentleman to pay for such an adventure and that he must have them safely in his pouch before he or his bestial would start. He helped me into the saddle and we proceeded, he walking ahead leading the mule. I was done with all side roads, after my last experience, and directed the fellow to follow the main highway.

Now there came the crackling of rifle fire to the southward and soon a wagon passed us with some wounded soldiers who called to us that the outposts were engaged below Flour Town and that there was a rumor of a general attack. At this my conductor, who grew steadily more nervous, refused to advance another step. Finding him proof against all cajolery, I dismounted to sit by the

roadside and watch him disappearing northward into the dusk.

I reflected that I must be a good league from my destination and wondered whether my strength would hold. Then a limping Continental came by and refreshed me from his canteen. Our left, he told me, under Weedon, was engaged with some raiding units of Tarleton's Command but he doubted if the affair would prove of great importance. Then he went on his way and I sat staring at the fitful flashes on the southern horizon, consumed with a growing loathing of my mission. I even began to doubt whether, without credentials of any sort, I should be admitted to Washington's presence until after fatal delay.

These forebodings were poor company at best, so I got to my feet and began to plod the muddy road towards Norriton Corners. I found this presently, although night had fallen, and was aware that sentries were posted. Going boldly up to one of these I inquired as to where General Washington and his staff lay. The soldier stared at me but told me that Headquarters had been moved into the house of George Emlen, at Whitemarsh, on the Bucks road, two miles to the eastward. I recollected this house well, a kindly two-story edifice where our family had often visited in

happier days, and so turned sharp left to take up my wearisome course between the puddles.

Emerging suddenly around a curve I came squarely upon the house and made sure that I had arrived at Headquarters, for two bivouac fires burned brightly on the lawn, sentries were posted at the gate, and lights glowed in every window. The house was patrolled by a detachment of Sullivan's Brigade and their Captain, a lank New Englander came up to inquire about my plight. I explained briefly that I was despatch bearer from General Lord Stirling and had been waylaid upon the road, demanding at the same time to be admitted to the presence either of General Washington or of Major General Muhlenberg. The officer seemed puzzled at my assurance and, beckoning the sentry from the front door of the Emlen house, directed that I be escorted to a rear room to await his Excellency's convenience.

As we passed through the high paneled hall, which I had known well in my childhood days, I heard voices, in earnest debate, from the great parlour. I asked my escort if General Washington were not within, and he answered that a conference of the High Command was being held and that I must await its issue. I made sure that if I lost this opportunity valuable hours might be wasted and, on a sudden resolve threw open the

door of the room and stepped in. A group of officers looked up in surprise at my impetuous entry.

The room which I recollected as a well ordered Quaker parlour, was now strangely transformed, for the walls were hung with military maps and the great dining room table, of other days, had been pulled into the center of the floor and was strewn with documents. The stately officer who sat at the head of the table I recognized at once, in his insignia of Commander-in-Chief, albeit he seemed older and more silvered than on that day three years before when he had come to my father's house in Philadelphia. He was dressed in his ordinary uniform of blue with the buff facings and his sword hung upon the chair behind him. To his right sat General Muhlenberg who stared at me as if endeavoring to piece together his recollections as to where he had met me before. To Muhlenberg's right was the pock-marked face of General Greene, next Colonel Knox, then Generals Weedon and Sullivan. My eye traveled about the circle and was arrested by the unlooked for apparition of Graydon wearing the same riding costume in which I had last seen him in Reading. There was a perplexing pause. The scandalized sentry was plucking at me from behind and two of the frowning Generals asked in the same voice as to

the meaning of the intrusion. Graydon arose in his seat and bowed to General Washington.

"Under favor, sir, I would present to your Excellency Master Mark Bingaman, whose errand we were but now discussing."

"Bingaman," ejaculated Muhlenberg. "I should never have known him."

The Generals stared but Washington nodded with one of his rare expressions of cordiality and motioned to the sentry to withdraw.

"We are heartily glad to see you, Master Bingaman. Captain Graydon has told us of your services in Reading and we would willingly hear the recital of your journey."

I advanced to the table, scarcely knowing how to commence with my confession of failure.

"Your Excellency," I forced myself to say, "I have a sorry tale to tell. I have been ambushed by Lutterloh and his gang, and robbed of General Gates' letter which Lord Stirling entrusted to my care."

I paused, utterly unable to proceed when, instead of the consternation which I had expected my statement to evoke, a smile ran about the board and his Excellency leaned over and picked out a letter from the mass before him and began to read a sentence.

"Heaven has surely decreed the success of the

Continental Cause or a weak General and unwise councillors had long since lost it——"

I stared at the letter and then up into the General's face. Graydon again interposed.

"If your Excellency will permit, I feel that we owe Master Bingaman an explanation and perhaps I were the best qualified to make it."

Washington nodded and Graydon drew me a chair, into which I was glad to sink for indeed, what with my accident and my perplexities, I was swaying as I stood.

"Forgive me Mark," continued the Captain, "if we did not give you the full measure of our confidence. His Excellency will attest that our omission arose not from want of trust in you but solely because our canny Stirling believed that you would the better play your part in ignorance. You must know that his Lordship and Major Monroe were advised that the town of Reading was full of spies in the interest of Conway, and they considered that the loss of the letter would speedily become known and that any likely messenger to headquarters would be followed and waylaid. So you were sent forth with a false despatch, to draw pursuit while I rode, unnoticed, down the Oley Road with the letter. Do not think unkindly of my preferment for, after all, I played the coward's part and you have done your devoir like a true patriot."

"Say, like a true American, Captain Graydon," interposed Washington, "and as I should have expected from what I know of Mr. Bingaman's character and forebears."

"When you have done coddling this boy," broke in General Greene in his rasping intonation, "I would suggest that the hour grows late and we should turn to the business at hand, which I take it is the disposition of the letter."

In a moment I was as completely forgotten as if I had never entered the room. General Weedon began to declaim about a Court Martial for Conway and Gates, pulling out a worn book of regulations to see under which section insubordination in a General Officer might be indicted. Peter Muhlenberg held up his hands in something of the old unctuous pulpit manner.

"Providence has given us a singular manifestation but this traitor, Conway, is nominated as one of the judges for the trial of General Wayne, which should begin tomorrow. It were like his effrontery to appear and claim his seat."

Knox said something about dispatching a courier instantly to Mr. Henry Laurens, President of the Congress, at York; Greene made a mysterious proposal concerning the cowhiding of traitors and ingrates.

During all of this conversation his Excellency

sat composedly writing upon some loose leaves of paper which lay on the table before him. At length he looked up.

"Come gentlemen, let us proceed with method. Now, who will attest that this letter is in General Gates' own script?"

"That will I," said Greene eagerly. "I have received his blundering orders often enough ere now."

"Your Excellency may indeed rest assured that it is the writing of Horatio Gates," said Graydon. "He and I were fellow students in the Medical School at Philadelphia in 1767 and I know his hand."

Washington took up General Gates' letter, together with the note which he had just written.

"Then, gentlemen, I call you all to witness that I am remitting the letter to Major General Gates in the following manner."

"*Sir,*

Chance has diverted to my possession a letter of yours quoting and endorsing certain sentiments of General Conway. This letter I herewith enclose to you.

I have the honor, Sir, to remain
Your Obedient Servant
George Washington"

The magnanimity of this was so compelling that for a space we all sat in stunned silence and then Greene arose from his seat.

"Is your Excellency mad to return the only evidence we have to shew the Congress the abominable treachery of this design?"

"General Greene," answered Washington, "I desire no post which my officers in their military experience and the Congress in its wisdom may doubt my ability to fill. Should they see fit to supersede me I will accept subordinate command or return to my plantation, or act in whatsoever manner may conduce to the common weal."

Sullivan unbuckled his sword and flung it upon the table.

"I resign my commission," said he, "rather than remain and serve under Horatio Gates."

"Take up your sword, General Sullivan," replied Washington with the calm dignity which he preserved throughout. "Your resignation is not accepted nor do I believe it will be urged after mature reflection."

And then as if to stifle the impending wave of protest. "No more cavil, gentlemen, I pray you. The matter is decided and we have much to do. Here is a courier from Cadwallader to say that the enemy may attack in force at Barren Hill; and, as you well know, the trial of General Wayne de-

mands our attention. Let each repair to his post. Master Bingaman, I request your momentary attendance."

After they had filed out, the General sat for a space lost in reflections, with his eyes upon the envelope which he had addressed in his bold free hand to Major General Horatio Gates, Commander of the Northern army at Albany. Then he looked up and caught my awed regard.

"Mark," said he, "you have well performed the part assigned to you. America, in these straits, has but meager recompense to bestow but posterity will not forget your services."

"Oh, sir," I broke in, in an agony of embarrassed shame, "my effort appears so pitiful. I was employed like a tool in whom no real confidence may be placed. I have been a puffball blown about by the caprice of those who might neither trust my honor nor my parts. Even the lucky chance which procured us the letter, which your Excellency now so magnanimously surrenders, was due to none of my contrivance but to the quick wit of a woman whose perception and patriotism put us all to shame."

Washington nodded at my reference.

"What I have heard of Mistress Abigail Potts, in this matter, was what I should have expected of her father's daughter. Our women show a de-

votion to the cause which our men do not always emulate, but do not belittle your own part, Master Bingaman. And remember that no man is so great or so small as he himself imagines. Your honesty and tenacity have succeeded where quicker wits might well have failed. And, now sir, your Government is straitened, as I have said, but here is an evidence of its approbation."

I looked at the parchment which the General extended to me and read thereon the appointment of Mark Bingaman, late of Philadelphia, as Captain upon the staff of Major General Peter Muhlenberg. Before I could rally my thoughts to frame a reply the General interposed.

"No more for the present, sir. Report to General Muhlenberg for your equipment. I shall expect to hear further of you in the field of honor."

I bowed and turned, leaving the Commander there alone, and as I went he inclined again over the sordid proof of the perfidy of a brother-in-arms, once trusted and beloved.

CHAPTER
TWENTY-TWO

I Conclude My Tale

And here ends my cognizance of that foul plot which, but for the intervention of Providence, by the obscure instruments with which He sometimes works His will, might well have undone the patriot cause. What passed thereafter is now history as all may read in that recital of the war upon which our Pennsylvania scribe, Mr. Bernard Hubley labors at Northumberland. Mifflin made haste to proffer his confused excuses and to reaffirm his allegiance. As usual, in a discredited conspiracy, the underlings must suffer most, and neither Lutterloh nor Wilkinson were again employed for active service in the duration of the War. Gates, posted down in great agitation from Saratoga to York where he made a poor mouth

before the Congress and would have it that he was never privy to the full intention of the Cabal. He cut a paltry figure, however, and there were few to credit his frantic asseverations.

The arch conspirator, Conway, next resigned his rank and became an object of general disdain. Washington's staunch friend, General Cadwallader, challenged him to the famous duel wherein Cadwallader shot Conway through the throat. "To silence," as he said, "his lying tongue." Conway, believing that he was dying, sent me a despairing missive in which he avowed his delinquencies and his regret that he had ever been induced to intrigue against Washington. He left our forces shortly thereafter and, I hear, has since served in Bengal and retrieved his military position in the armies of the French King, whereat I rejoice. For, with all his foibles, I could never bring myself to think unkindly of Conway but have ever averred that but for evil associates he might have left a name, as a debonnair cavalier, second only to that of the great Marquis.

Abigail sent me greeting as the occasion served. When I lay with Muhlenberg's Brigade before Monmouth, much plagued with a galling fever, I received a note from her regretting the termination of the stirring days.

"Since Philadelphia is again liberated most of our Fashionables have left us. Graydon still tarries awaiting the Clients who never come, but old Mistress Graydon hath removed already, and it is whispered that Mr. John Penn, our quondam Proprietary, pays her marked attention. Since the War rolled Southward our Reading Garrison is withdrawn. The Britishers are mostly exchanged and the Hessians are removed to a new Encampment on the Southern Slopes of Mount Penn, where they herd like Swine. Dr. Otto is Home from the Wars and loud in thy Praises. There is little Society. No more Routs or shad fishing Parties, and the Town is grown as dull as Mr. James Read's Wig. This same Mr. Read is now nominated Commissioner of the Admiralty and we are free, this while, of his tedious iterations. Charles Biddle (now in residence here) marvels that a Man who remembers his Anecdotes with such pitiless accuracy as doth Mr. Read, should not also recall that he has told them twenty times before. Few resort to the Mifflin House at Angelica, and all look askance at the General for his Part in the late Plot. He protests, however, that he would have none of the Cabal and that he saved your Life from Lutterloh. 'Tis said that he will shortly sell Angelica to our Surveyor General,

Mr. Nicholson, and remove his Family to their seat at Falls of Schuylkill——"

I never saw my pert hostess again. When Dr. Jonathan Potts came to his untimely and lamented end, the family removed to the new settlements in the Ohio. There Abigail still resides, the spouse of one Harmon, since Lieutenant Governor of the Territory—and the mother of ten children. A bustling, active consort, as you may guess, and the marvel of the country side for vivacity and punctilio.

I am an old man, now, older in condition than in years, and often I evoke the crowding visions of the days long gone, of Cornwallis writing at his desk in Second Street, of Conway curvetting on the Oley Road, Abigail waiting in the garden, and Wilkinson quaffing his maudlin toast from the saddle in Penn Square.

Assuredly the times are altered since that piping September morning when Gradyon and I rode up into the country of the Palatines. Of the ardent lads who crossed the seas to risk life and fortune in our quarrel many have met with an ignoble end. De Brissot has been guillotined; young De Portail who fought beside me at King's Mountain is under sentence of death at Nantes; the Chevalier de Montfort our interpreter at Yorktown fell in the attack upon the Tuilleries. We

Americans are now a welded State to be reckoned with by ally and by foe, while the polite nation which befriended us treads the path of bloodshed and anarchy, hooting its winsome queen through the streets of her capital to die on a public scaffold.

But sometimes as I sit here in this pleasant house of Logan and the evening shadows gather over the hills which Tarleton's rangers once fortified, the present fades in my reverie, and I see again the champaigns of the upper Schuylkill rolling northward to the grim mountain wall, the rushing river, the great barns, the square limestone houses of that sturdy Rhineland folk amongst whom I dwelt in those eventful weeks of my early youth, when, to the best of my poor talent, I quickened to my country's call.

The End

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